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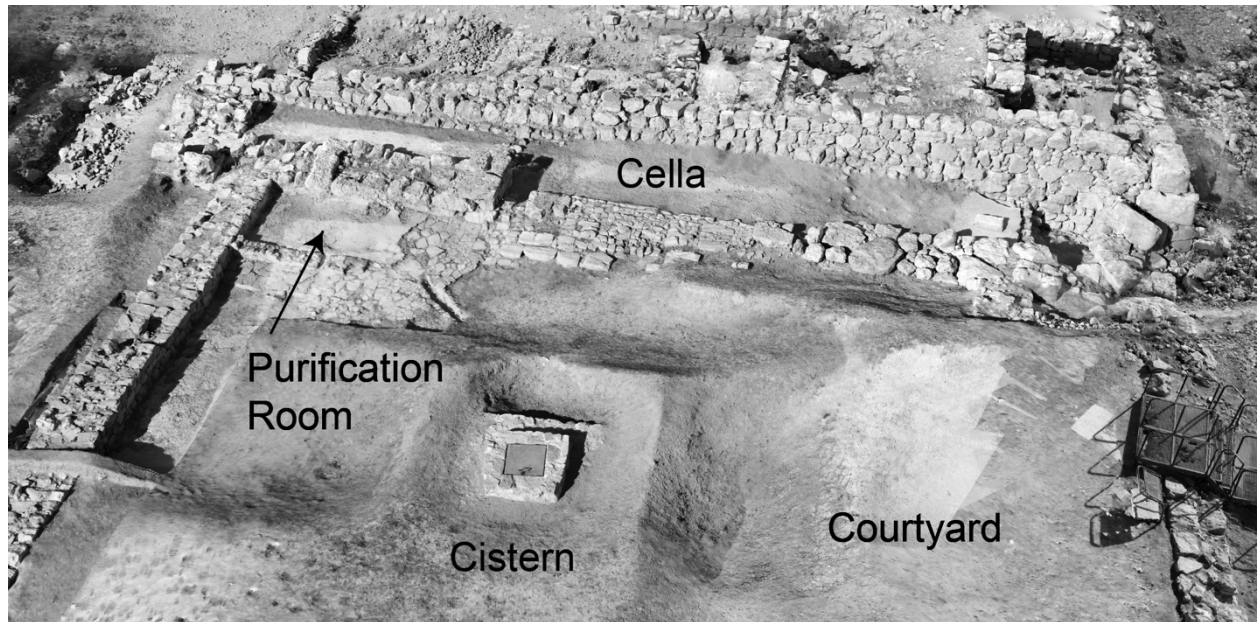
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Emergent Networks in Iron Age Southern Jordan: A View from Ancient Busayra



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Beginning at the turn of the first millennium BCE, communities in the Levant formed modestly sized independent polities, from the Luwian Neo-Hittite and Aramaean kingdoms in the north to Israel, Judah, Moab, and Edom in the south. This was a unique sociopolitical “moment” in the history of the Levant, which had been ruled externally by New Kingdom Egypt and Hatti in the Late Bronze Age, and would soon be subjugated by a series of Mesopotamian, Mediterranean, Islamic, and European empires from the mid-first millennium BCE to the recent past. Elites emerging within these independent polities fashioned themselves as kings and designated specific settlements to serve as political, economic, and religious centers, or what this volume described as ‘royal cities.’ Despite over a century and a half of archaeological investigation, the excavations of Aleppo, Dhiban, Jerusalem, Karkemish, Samaria, and Zincirli, to name just a few of these centers, have only somewhat advanced an understanding of how political authority was enacted. Our knowledge of the degree to which kings were able to influence those they claimed as constituents remains fragmentary due to obscuration by later building activities (Damascus, Jerusalem), modern conflicts (Karkemish, Samaria), and lack of modern excavation techniques.

The southernmost Iron Age Levantine royal city, Boşrah, modern Busayra, the likely political, economic, and ritual hub of the Kingdom of Edom, is not exempt from these problems (see below), yet the preservation of a 2.6-hectare portion of the site on land owned by Jordan’s Department of Antiquities, far from modern conflict zones and largely devoid of later building activities, offers one of the best opportunities to study the Iron Age ‘polity-effect’ as described in the introduction to this volume. Crystal Bennett’s substantial excavations of the site during the 1970s (Bienkowski 2002) and the authors’ renewed investigations starting in 2013 (Brown et al. 2016; Brown, Porter, and Wilson 2016; Porter et al. 2014; McGeough et al. forthcoming) have interpreted this land to be the location of the site’s acropolis, and documented a complex of monumental buildings. However, these remains constitute only a portion of the overall site. Scholarly publications since the 1980s (Bienkowski 2002, Fig. 1.2), including those by one author here (e.g., Porter 2004, Fig. 3), have regularly characterized ancient Busayra’s settlement design as one that was restricted to this area in drawings and photographs. Additionally, architectural plans have been published that decontextualize buildings from their physical setting, ignoring their positions across the settlement (e.g., Bienkowski 2008, Figures 11.7-8; Porter 2004, Fig. 3, among others). Although impressive from afar, these images have inadvertently provided readers with a false impression of ancient Busayra’s settlement design. A synthesis of excavated, surveyed,

and remotely sensed evidence indicates that the Iron Age settlement was more extensive than what has been previously conveyed.

In this chapter, we draw on this array of excavated, surveyed, and remotely sensed evidence collected by the Busayra Cultural Heritage Project (the BCHP) and earlier projects (e.g., Bienkowski 2002; MacDonald 2004) to provide an updated description of Busayra. This fresh appreciation of Busayra's settlement design, when considered alongside other evidence from the arid zones of the southern Levant, suggests not only that the Iron Age settlement was more extensive than what has been previously conveyed, but that Busayra should be understood as an emergent central place or node within interlocking regional and trans-regional networks that crossed the arid zones, connecting the Arabian Peninsula with the Red and Mediterranean Seas. Busayra offered initial material affordances such as fresh water, defensible topography, and grazing lands that its inhabitants eventually converted into material and symbolic wealth that sustained elites and a large population. In turn, this infrastructure drew people to Busayra, enabling its operation as a key way station for long-distance caravans passing through the arid zone's cosmopolitan commercial networks and local mobile communities moving between winter and summer pastures. As a central place within several overlapping networks, Busayra is a setting in which it is possible to observe both polity-making practices and the principles of intelligibility that undergird those practices (see Introduction to this volume). Furthermore, our focus on relational networks challenges established paradigms about Iron Age Levantine kingdoms as hermetically sealed territorial entities. We argue instead that Busayra's elite ruled over people, networks, and places, not a fixed, bounded, and contiguous territory.

EDOM AND BOŞRAH: A BRIEF HISTORY

Modern Busayra is located today in southwest Jordan approximately 45 km north of ancient Petra and 10 km south of modern Tafila. The ancient settlement sat at the junction of a dendritic network of roads that connected northern Arabia and the Red Sea with Mediterranean ports such as Ashkelon and Gaza as well as northern destinations such as Karak, Amman, and Damascus.¹ Busayra's association with ancient Edom is substantiated by its ancient name

¹Abudanah et al. (2015) demonstrate an archaeologically attested north-south primary route through Southern Jordan with east-west branches from the Iron II period onwards. However, like many of our colleagues (e.g., Bienkowski (2001, 268-269, and elsewhere), we question whether one should reduce western Jordan's commercial routes to a singular 'King's Highway'

Boşrah's mention in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Amos 1:12; Isaiah 34, 63; Jeremiah 49; 1 Chronicles 1:44). Although the biblical sources never proclaim the town specifically as Edom's political capital, Boşrah is elevated above other known settlements in southern Jordan (e.g., Sela'), suggesting that the town was recognized as an important political center in the first half of the first millennium BCE.

The name 'Edom' first appears in thirteenth-century Egyptian sources to describe an unincorporated region located somewhere in southwest Jordan. Edom is used interchangeably with a related toponym, 'Seir,' both of which denote a mountainous region where the *shashu* (or *shasu*), groups of unincorporated pastoralists, lived beyond Egypt's reach (Kitchen 1992, 27). The *shashu* were also likely responsible for the intensification of copper mining activities in the hills below and south of Busayra and across the Jordan Rift Valley between the thirteenth and ninth centuries BCE (Ben-Yosef 2018; Levy, Najjar, and Ben-Yosef 2014). Scholars continue to debate whether this industry was guided by external forces (e.g., New Kingdom Egypt) or was the collective will of enterprising indigenous mining communities responding to regional demands for copper.

This is an important question for several reasons, not least because an answer could explain why physical evidence for Edom's political growth becomes visible only after the decline of the region's copper industry starting in the mid-eighth century BCE. Lacking a written source such as Moab's Mesha Inscription or even a retrospective narrative like the Hebrew Bible that describes the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah's political development, one must rely instead on archaeological evidence and its patterning in southwest Jordan's archaeological record. Most conspicuous is the emergence of a two-tier, and possibly a three-tier, settlement hierarchy of small agro-pastoralist settlements (e.g., Khirbat al-Mu'allaq), some of which were remotely located in mountainous locations (e.g., Umm al-Biyara, as-Sadeh) (Bienkowski 2014, 787-789; Bienkowski 2022: 123-125). Concurrently, Assyrian sources (e.g., see Millard 1992 for summary) and archaeologically recovered epigraphic sources (e.g., the Qos-Gabr seal impression (Van der Veen in Bienkowski 2011, 79-81)) identify 'kings' representing Edom. The cult of what was purportedly Edom's patron deity Qos also intensified starting in the mid-eighth century BCE,

that extended from the Red Sea to Damascus. Human mobility across the arid zones of the Southern Levant was likely guided by contingencies such as territory, topography, and resources including water and access to stations where humans and animals could find safety and supplies.

evidence for which is visible in the increased use of the deity's theophoric element in the Southern Levant's onomasticon (Danielson 2021; Porter 2004, Tables 1-2). As shall be described below, a monumental building in Busayra has been tentatively interpreted as a temple, possibly dedicated to Qos (Bienkowski 2002, 479).

Altogether, this evidence from southern Jordan follows patterns of political centralization and economic intensification seen a century earlier in the Southern Levant that are attributed to the emergence of the Kingdoms of Israel, Judah, and Moab (Porter 2016). Scholars combine aspirational statements made in biblical sources about territorial boundaries with archaeological theories of the state to spatialize these polities across the political landscape of the Iron Age Southern Levant (e.g., Joffe 2002). This shared template of Iron Age sovereignty, if even valid for those kingdoms, may not necessarily have applied to the emergent Kingdom of Edom. It is difficult to measure how successful Busayra's elites were in integrating all of southern Jordan into a territorial polity. Rather, as we argue below, the Kingdom of Edom was likely managed through a series of interlocking, but fluctuating and tenuous networks created through political and economic relationships that governed the flow of people, animals, raw materials, and finished goods. People and places were integrated into these networks at times, but disassociated at other times.

Edom's political and economic development eventually caught the attention of the Assyrian Empire as it was expanding its reach throughout the Levant during the eighth and seventh centuries BCE (Faust 2021; Tyson and Herrmann 2018). Edom's kings preserved some of their autonomy by agreeing to serve as a vassal that paid annual amounts of tribute and pledged their allegiance to the Assyrian king. One should not necessarily understand Edom's subordinate position as disadvantageous, however. In fact, Assyria's involvement in Edom and adjacent arid zones likely accelerated the dendritic networks extending from northern Arabia to the Mediterranean, flowing through Busayra.

It is unclear how southern Jordan was affected by Egypt's renewed interests in the Southern Levant during an opportunistic vacuum created by Assyria's decline in the final decades of the seventh century (Schipper 2011). Unlike its neighbors, Edom likely staved off the Babylonian Empire's destructive wrath in the first few waves of military campaigns during the early decades of the sixth century. The Babylonian king Nabonidus's fragmentary campaign itinerary describing his attack of Edom and the cliff relief inscribed at Sela' (Da Riva 2020), a few

kilometers from Busayra, suggest Edom was greatly compromised around 550 BCE (Crowell 2007).

Around this time, Busayra's monumental buildings were destroyed in a fiery collapse. The ceramic vessels retrieved from the floors and destruction debris of the buildings on the acropolis can be dated broadly within the Iron IIC/Persian horizon, and likely the seventh and sixth centuries BCE. A more precise dating of the ceramic vessel corpus, as well as a refined understanding of the architectural phases preceding and following the destruction event, are the subject of ongoing research. Unfortunately, radiocarbon dates from short-lived organic materials are not an option in this case because of the poor quality of the mid-first millennium BCE's calibration curve. Due to the aforementioned military campaign of Nabonidus, known to have occurred in Busayra's vicinity, this destruction is likely attributable to the Babylonian armies that attacked and burned multiple Iron Age settlements during the sixth century (e.g., Ekron; Jerusalem). The discovery of bronze and iron weapons within the destruction layer suggest it was the result of violence. The Babylonian destruction disrupted Busayra's participation in the arid zone exchange networks until the region reorganized itself during Achaemenid Persian imperial rule as early as the late sixth century. Although Busayra was revived soon after its destruction and continued to be occupied for at least a short while, our focus in this chapter is the period prior to the Babylonian attack, equivalent to Bienkowski's Integrated Stage 2 (Bienkowski 2002, Table 14.1).

SUBSISTENCE AND SECURITY

The topographic and ecological affordances of Busayra are two principal reasons why the area was an ideal location for a prominent settlement. Busayra sits on a narrow limestone and sandstone interfluvium shaped by alluvial erosion in two wadis, the Wadi Janin on the east and the more gradually sloping Wadi Qarqur on the west. The two wadis converge below the flat landform's northern tip to form the Wadi Busayra (or, alternatively named, the Wadi Hamayidah), that drains west to the Jordan Rift Valley, exiting just south of the Dead Sea.² The interfluvium narrows considerably on its southern side before joining the Transjordan Plateau. The

² This and neighboring drainage systems (e.g., the Wadi Dana) also provided footpaths that connected the highlands with the Jordan Rift Valley and destinations to the west, such as Beer Sheva and Gaza (Levy, Najjar, and Ben-Yosef 2014: 493-575).

landform gradually tilts upward until reaching its highest elevation that many consider the ancient settlement's acropolis before descending downward, eventually reaching the start of the Wadi Hamayidah. Estimating the total occupied area of the interfluvium during the Iron Age is challenging due to the presence of modern buildings that obscure natural and ancient features. Measurements drawn from satellite images indicate that it is approximately 1.6 km long from north to south, and as wide as 200 meters in places, not adjusting for slope (Fig. 1). A reasonable estimate of the landform's potentially habitable space is approximately 32 ha, although this estimate is not precise. Archaeological surveys inside the modern town collected a significant number of Iron Age ceramic vessel sherds denoting that the settlement extended throughout the interfluvium (MacDonald 2002; 2004, 272-274). However, population density is difficult to calculate with much accuracy due to the poor preservation of ancient architectural features coupled with modern construction activity during the past century.

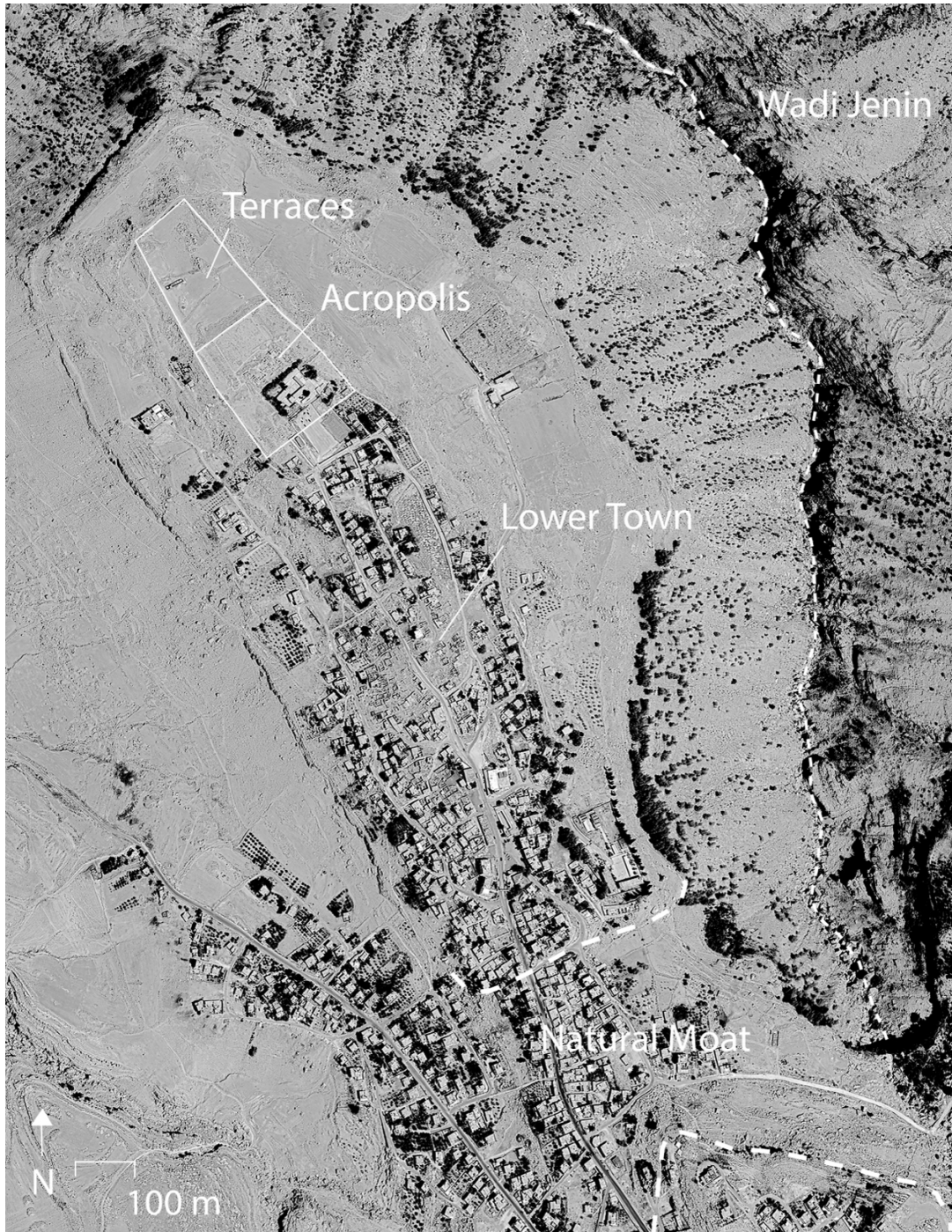


Figure 1 – Busayra with the acropolis, terrace system, lower town, and natural moat noted. The course of the Wadi Jenin is shown with a dotted line. (Image: Google Earth).

The narrow promontory of the interfluvium on which Busayra sat is an example of a broadly shared settlement design choice for Iron Age communities in western Jordan. Karak, likely the ancient Moabite settlement Kir-Haraseth, was established on an elevated promontory overlooking a major road that descends to the Jordan Rift Valley and Dead Sea. Early Iron Age settlements east of Karak such as Khirbat al-Mudayna al-‘Aliya (Routledge 2000) and Khirbat al-Mudayna al-Mu‘arradja (Olávarri 1977-78; 1983) are perched on well-protected promontories along the Wadi al-Mujib corridor. Iron Age settlements have also been documented on the northern edge of the Wadi al-Hasa such as Khirbat al-‘Akuzeh (Miller 1991; Site no. 428). Occupying these promontories alleviated two major concerns for Iron Age settlements: subsistence and defense. Lush riparian zones fed by ground and surface waters at the bottom of the perennial drainages supported agro-pastoralist economies (Porter 2014). At Busayra, freshwater springs are found beneath the settlement that drain into the Wadi Jenin. These springs watered agricultural fields, terraces, and livestock, and created opportunities for hunting wild animals and limited fishing. Households could harvest fruit and olive trees and collect wild plants that could also be used for domestic construction materials.

The cliffs that descend to the wadi canyons on three sides of the promontory also offered settlements a head-start in defensive infrastructure. To supplement these natural defenses, an extensive fortification system was constructed using quarried stone from outcrops inside and surrounding the settlement. Iron Age Busayra’s fortification system is visible on the surface across much of the promontory’s northern half. Large, mostly unhewn stones were dry-laid to create tall walls that ranged between 1.5 and 3.5 meters thick. These walls both demarcated the settlement’s official perimeter and shaped each terrace on the settlement’s northern half. So far, only one entrance, a small postern gate, has been identified that provided an entrance into a courtyard adjacent to a series of residences (Bennett’s Area B; Bienkowski 2002, 111-147). Fortifications south of the acropolis have largely been dismantled through later building activities. MacDonald identified a 6.25 by 4.25 m exposed wall about 0.9 km south of Busayra’s acropolis that was sandwiched between two modern apartments (TBAS Site 132; MacDonald 2004, 272-274). Other sizable stone walls were observed in this survey project, although most examples are no longer visible.

The narrow ‘bridge’ where the promontory joined the plateau was both a natural entrance to the settlement as well as its weakest point in Busayra’s defenses. A substantial stone

tower is preserved on the southern edge of Busayra's promontory, overlooking the Wadi Janin (Figure 2).³ The structure is partially buried, leaving only the corner of an approximately 5 m high by 16 m wide portion visible. The structure was constructed using similar materials — rough unhewn stones — and techniques as the fortifications on the promontory's northern side. This tower was likely part of a fortification system that guarded the vulnerable access point between the plateau and promontory. Further supporting this interpretation is an approximately 250-m wide depression between the plateau and the promontory that is today partially filled with modern homes. This depression may have been a moat that was quarried from the bedrock. Such moats from which stones were mined for nearby construction projects have been documented at other Iron Age settlements established on promontories, the most notable being Khirbat al-Mudayna al-'Aliya (Routledge 2000) and Khirbat al-Mudayna al-Mu'arradja (Olávarri 1983; 1988). At the former, the moat's width was 18.75 m wide, 35 m long, and 5 m deep (Routledge 2000, 48).

³ The structure is next to a modern school and was last documented in 2013.

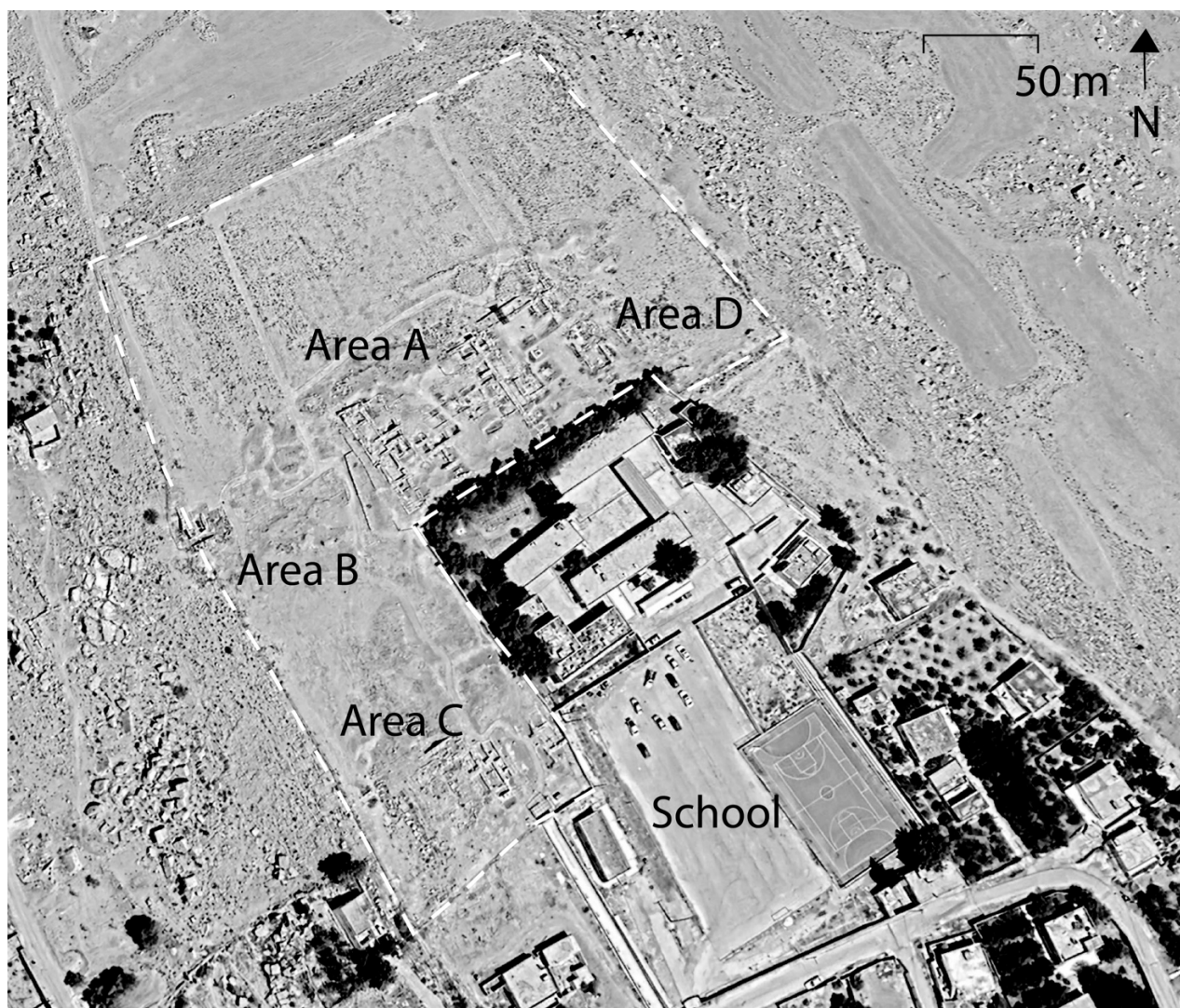


Figure 2 – Busayra’s acropolis with Bennett’s excavation areas noted. The dotted line demarcates the property line of Jordan’s Department of Antiquities (Image: Google Earth).

BUILDING BUSAYRA’S POLITICAL AND SYMBOLIC POWER

There is a dearth of sufficient information to describe the earliest settlement episodes on the Busayra promontory. Fragmentary walls and surfaces constructed on bedrock attest to the presence of an earlier settlement that was obscured by later building practices (Integrated Stage Phase 1; Bienkowski 2002, Table 14.1). What is difficult to determine is when this settlement episode (or episodes) started. The presence of ceramic vessel fragments that possibly date to the late second and early first millennium BCE (i.e., the Early Iron Age) in secondary contexts

further suggests the promontory saw settlement activity prior to the later wave of settlement intensification in the region (Bienkowski 2002, Fig. 9.42: 12, 17).

While the earliest settlement episodes are so-far difficult to determine, there is no question that Busayra grew to become what was likely the most prominent settlement in southern Jordan starting in the eighth century.⁴ Evidence for this prosperity is visible on the promontory's highest point where an extensive monumental building complex was constructed. Unfortunately, an estimated one-third of this acropolis is unavailable for study, having been dismantled during the construction of a modern elementary school. Corona satellite images produced between 1967 and 1970, just a few years before the school's construction, show the outlines of buildings sitting on or near the surface.⁵ A partially preserved stone wall built using Iron Age construction styles is still visible below the school's east perimeter wall (Fig. 3).

⁴ Some caution here is necessary as little is known about the Iron Age settlements in and around modern Tafilah that could have hosted large populations (MacDonald 2004: 56–58).

⁵ Visit <https://corona.cast.uark.edu/atlas#zoom=18¢er=3963473,3599780> to examine different layers of satellite images taken between 1967 and 1970.



Figure 3 -- The corner of a stone tower is preserved on the southern edge of Busayra's promontory, overlooking the Wadi Janin. The structure was built using similar materials — rough unhewn stones — and techniques as the fortifications on the promontory's northern side (Image: B. Porter).

Although the acropolis's southern extent is not available for study, its northern half is much better documented thanks to its preservation on the aforementioned 2.6-hectare property owned by Jordan's Department of Antiquities. Bennett's excavations during the 1970s identified two monumental buildings here (Areas A and C; Bienkowski 2002), both of which were likely part of the acropolis's monumental complex. The BCHP's renewed work has followed up with strategic excavation and site cleaning projects designed to answer outstanding questions about these buildings (Brown 2018a; Brown, Porter, and Wilson 2016; McGeough et al. forthcoming). The BCHP also conducted a comprehensive geophysical survey of unexcavated areas that identified several new sub-surface structures (Brown et al. 2016).

Collectively, these efforts have determined that the acropolis's centerpiece was a fortified monumental building program consisting of several interior buildings and courtyards. A visitor

gained access to the fortified complex by first passing through a large horizontal courtyard on the external side of the complex's eastern fortification wall. The visitor then entered the complex through a chambered gate that was remotely detected on the building complex's northeast corner. After passing through the gate, the visitor entered a large courtyard surrounded by small rectangular rooms on its north and west sides. The visitor then turned south, proceeding through a passageway that led them to the building that was likely the principal reason for visiting the complex. Bennett excavated portions of this 2,325 m² horizontal building, referred to as the Area A Building, which was designed in two sections, each organized around an interior rectangular courtyard (Bienkowski 2002, 57-109).⁶ The west wing was likely dedicated to storage and food production. The BCHIP's 2014 excavations in one room on the building's western perimeter identified a kitchen with installations for grain processing and baking.

It is in the Area A building's east wing where the purpose of the building and perhaps the entire monumental complex was discovered (Figure 4). This wing was entered through a narrow gate on the complex's northeast side that opened into a rectangular courtyard. Horizontal rooms were documented on three sides of this courtyard, one of which appears to have been a location for either a throne or a cult statue (Bienkowski 2002, 79; plates 4.53-4.55). Bennett argued that the space served a ritual purpose as a cella, or 'holy of holies,' where statues and ritual equipment would have been visible to worshippers standing in the eastern courtyard (Bennett 1977; 1983). Supporting this hypothesis was a cobbled threshold of fire-cracked red stones on which either side was located a pedestal that supported pillars or statues. The interior of the room was paved with a thick white plaster. Semi-circular stone podia on which pillars or statues could have sat, framed this entrance. Only a few objects that could be associated with ritual activity were recovered here, including a copper alloy chair fitting that may have been associated with a throne (Bienkowski 2002, plates 206, 207). However, excavations by the BCHIP uncovered a carved stone monolith inside the cella that may have been a standing stone serving as the focus of

⁶ The western half of the Area A building is partially obscured by a rectangular monumental building that was constructed on the foundations of the original building after its destruction that likely occurred in the mid-sixth century BCE. The discussion here is confined to evidence Bienkowski and the BCHIP have assigned to Area A's Phase 3 while the later building is assigned to Area A Phase 4 (Bienkowski 2002: Table 14.1). The Phase 4 building is indeed significant and the BCHIP plans to carry out further research on the building in the future.

cult activity (McGeough et al. forthcoming).



Figure 4 -- Ancient walls and cultural deposits resting under the modern school's eastern boundary wall. The wall is likely associated with Busayra's monumental complex that was partially dismantled when the school was constructed (Image: B. Porter; 2014).

The BCHP's renewed excavations in the courtyard also suggest that ritual activities took place within the Area A Building. What remains undetermined is which deity or deities were worshipped there. Qos, the kingdom's patron deity whose name frequently appeared in Edomite personal names, is a likely candidate. More certain are the ritual practices that occurred inside the courtyard. Bennett's team documented a flagstone surface in the southwest corner of the eastern courtyard that eventually gives way to the white plaster surface that extends across the entire courtyard (Figure 5). A channel cuts into the flagstone pavement and drains toward a prominent cistern in the courtyard's center. A plaster-lined installation was constructed above a portion of the flagstone surface. The co-occurrence of plaster and a drain led Bennett to interpret this installation as a "washing" or "purification" room associated with rituals that supported the sacred space located in the cella (Bennett 1977, 4-6; 1983, 15; Bienkowski 2002, 94, 475). A second drain originating outside the entrance to the courtyard also leads toward the cistern

(Bienkowski 2002, 77).

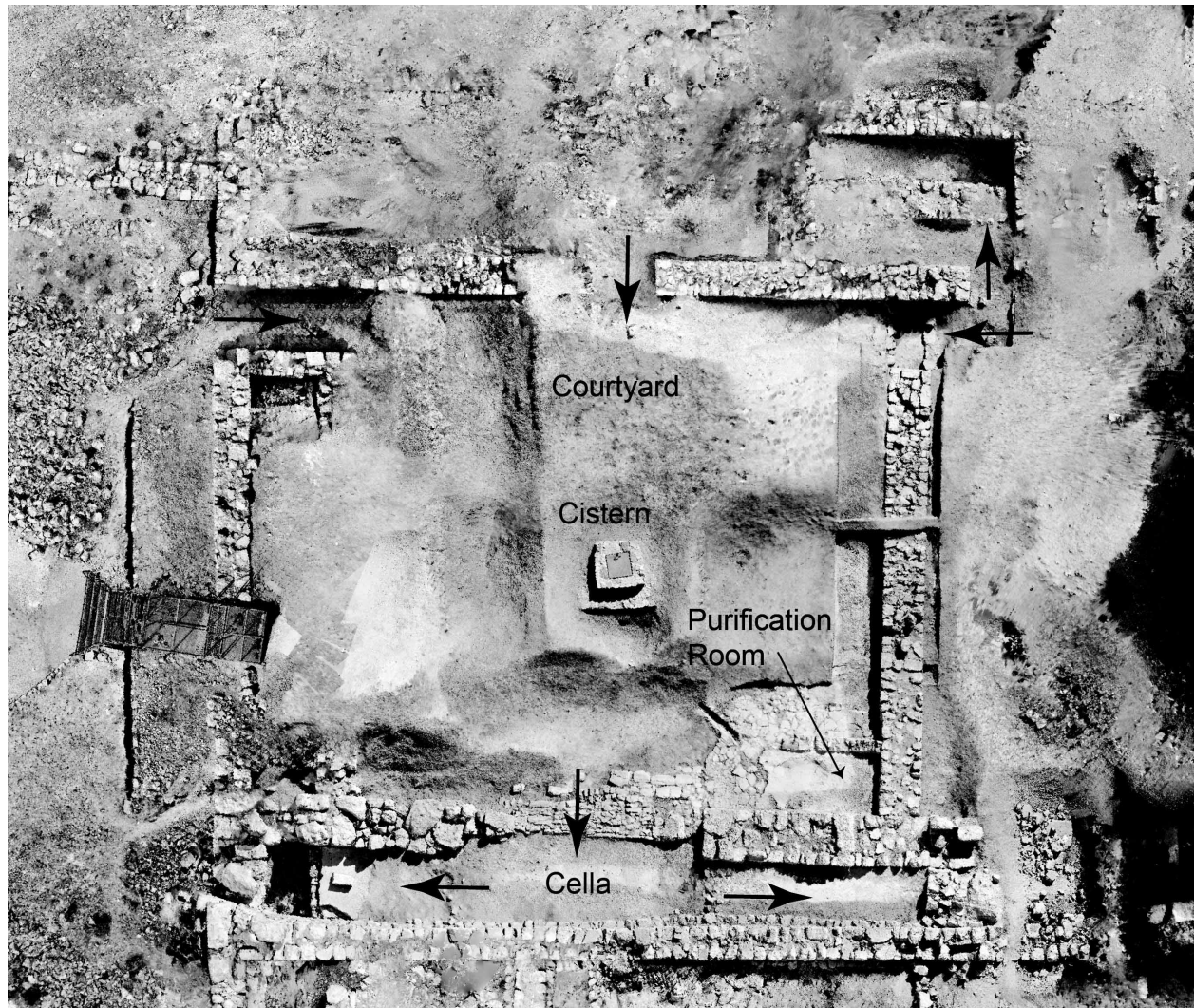


Figure 5 – East courtyard of the Area A building (Image: M. Vincent and B. Porter; courtesy of Global Digital Heritage and the American Center of Research).

Next to these water installations, the two excavation projects have documented hundreds of broken ceramic vessel sherds belonging to a particular type of cylindrical holemouth jar smashed onto the floors and within the mudbrick collapse of the courtyard and surrounding rooms. The distribution of these jars, designated Jar Type E, is limited mainly to the Area A Building at the site (Bienkowski 2002, 313, Figs. 9.47-9.49). Parallels from sites in the broader Levant confirm a similar distribution pattern: an association with monumental or public

buildings and the presence of many examples together in large quantities (Bienkowski 2002, 94–95; Gitin 2017, 123; Greenhut and de Groot 2009: 100–103; 221; Panitz-Cohen 2020, 209).

This mass production, limited distribution, and relatively high degree of standardization has led researchers to interpret them as vessels used in the parceling out of exact amounts of dry or liquid commodities as part of palace or temple economies (Butcher et al. 2022). Their association with water installations at Busayra suggests their use in measuring out precise amounts of water either for ritual use or as a system of distributing Busayra's central collection of water (or some other commodity) to participants in the temple rituals.

The temple reflects how Busayra's elites leveraged the promontory's material affordances of water and stone to advance the settlement's symbolic importance as a place of ritual practice. To participate in these washing rituals, one was required to traverse the promontory's steep cliffs and collect water from the springs and pools, a major investment of time and labor. This conspicuous collection and display of water in a marginal ecological zone like southern Jordan likely served as a powerful symbol for those living in and passing through Busayra. The monumental building and the ritual practices performed inside it elevated Busayra's auratic power, promoting its status as a prominent node in regional and trans-regional networks.

Indeed, the entire monumental building complex showcased the capacity of Busayra's elites to recruit the labor required to construct and maintain a substantial administrative apparatus. To convey this message of strength and wealth, elites drew on multiple design elements that are reminiscent of Mesopotamian Assyrian architecture, namely the large open courtyards and the use of an artificial podium designed to elevate the building above its surroundings. Such building designs can be found in the Assyrian capitals (e.g., Khorsabad, Nineveh, and Nimrud) of northern Iraq as well as in major political centers in the Northern Levant (e.g., Sam'al, Karkemish) and Southern Levant (Tell Abu Salima Stratum G; Ekron Temple Complex 650, Hazor Area B Citadel Stratum III, the Lachish residency, and Megiddo Stratum III Buildings 1052 and 1369, to name only a few; Kertai 2018).

Assyrian design elements are also on exhibit in the Area C Building located south of the Area A Building. This rectangular complex, at least 624 m² in area, was likely one wing of the monumental building complex; whatever connection the building had to the broader complex was obscured by the modern school's construction. Bennett observed several design elements of the building that are reminiscent of Assyrian palaces in northern Iraq (Bennett 1982). Such

elements include a long horizontal room with a thick plaster floor that may have served as a reception room (Bienkowski 2002, 162, Plates 6.27–6.28; 170; 194); toilets (Bienkowski 2002, 166–167, Plates 6.43–6.47); and its construction on a platform that elevated the building above its surroundings. Since the discovery of the Area C building, additional Iron Age buildings with similar design elements have been identified in the Southern Levant, notably Ayyalet Ha-Shahar.

The ubiquity of these design elements throughout the Southern Levant suggests they were part of an international architectural *koiné* inspired by the circulation of Mesopotamian culture in the Levant during the eighth and seventh centuries. Busayra's elites appropriated these design choices in their monumental building program to convey the town's material and symbolic strength.

MODERATING REGIONAL FOOD NETWORKS

The promontory's capacity for built space suggests Busayra's population may have been significant. Although impossible to detect now, neighborhoods of houses could have spanned the space between the edge of the promontory and the acropolis. The houses excavated in Area B, west of the Area A building and north of the Area C building, and in Area D, east of the Area A building, provide a glimpse into the domestic residences that were in the shadow of the monumental building complex. In Area B, a single-chamber postern gate in the main fortification wall opened into a small plaza that gave way to rows of horizontal buildings (Bienkowski 2002, 111-147; figs. 5.1-5.2; Brown et al. 2016, figs. 3-4). In Area D, Bennett's team and the BCHIP have identified a series of rectangular rooms belonging to two or three structures of a similar domestic character (Bienkowski 2002, 207-223; Brown 2018, 95-103; Hart 1995). The limited faunal and botanical evidence collected from Busayra's domestic contexts and those in surrounding settlements in southern Jordan unsurprisingly indicate that grain and fruit agriculture combined with an emphasis on animal husbandry were key subsistence practices in the region (Bienkowski 2002, 471-474; Brown 2018: 117-121; Clutton-Brock in Bienkowski 2011).

If indeed Busayra's population was as large as projected here, the settlement had significant subsistence demands that could not have been met from the town's agro-pastoralist economies in the immediate area. Ritual and administrative activities carried out by the acropolis likely placed additional demands for agricultural materials on producers. Scholars have

interpreted the appearance of modest agricultural villages in southern Jordan during the eighth century as a response to increased subsistence requirements for the Kingdom of Edom, citing the simultaneous development of Busayra's acropolis. These settlements have been documented in archaeological surveys (Macdonald 2015, 24–41, 96–97) and a handful have been excavated (e.g., Umm al-Biyara, Tawilan). Notably, this settlement activity is a significant intensification in sedentary activity in Busayra's hinterland compared to earlier centuries, and marks a significant shift from the settlement pattern of the early Iron Age, when settlement was concentrated in and around the copper mining activities in the canyons descending into the Jordan Rift Valley (Levy, Najjar, and Ben-Yosef 2014).

Territory-based models of ancient polities have been applied to this evidence to argue that Busayra controlled a commanding agro-pastoralist economy over southern Jordan's agricultural hinterland (Porter 2004). These villages were certainly in the same economic and cultural orbit as Busayra as they share similarities in material culture and architectural styles, notably the horizontal building designs seen in Busayra's Areas B and D, described above. The locations and material culture of these new settlements, however, complicates this picture in different ways. Many of these settlements (e.g., Tawilan and Umm al-Biyara) are located 50 kilometers or more from Busayra. Furthermore, many settlements existed on top of well-defended plateaus that would have been difficult to access (Umm al-Biyara and Ba'ja). Iron Age communities occupying the Wadi el-Feidh, for example, constructed a low-visibility landscape of dispersed and subtle agricultural terraces, water harvesting facilities, animal pens, cemeteries, campsites, and houses accessed via hidden footpaths. This pattern of low-intensity agropastoralism being practiced in secretive, remote locations, suggests these communities were actively trying to avoid "state-ness" (Knabb 2022).

Although well-protected and physically isolated, these communities were not fully disconnected from the wider region. In fact, a surprising number of luxury items were documented in these modest villages, indicating that their inhabitants had access to the caravans passing through the region. Porter has speculated that Busayra's elites may have sent these objects as gifts to remote villages to forge and sustain relationships (Porter 2004).

Yet there are also less-remote agricultural settlements that positioned themselves adjacent to fertile valleys with winter drainages and good soils throughout southern Jordan. These settlements are littered throughout southern Jordan's thin Mediterranean zone extending from

the Wadi al-Hasa to Ras al-Naqb. Unfortunately, many of these settlements have only been documented in surveys and have yet to be excavated or were only explored in limited probes. Prominent examples include the villages at Khirbat al-Qa'ayr, Khirbat al-Kur, and Khirbat al-Iraq Shamliya (MacDonald 2004, 224; MacDonald 2015, 32–33). Rain-fed agriculture to the east of this Mediterranean zone is challenged by deflated soils in most areas, making the region more suitable for pastoralism.

Commanding such a bifurcated and dispersed agricultural system throughout southern Jordan was likely difficult for Busayra's elites. An alternative to the territorial model would be conceiving of Edom as a series of overlapping but fragile networks. Busayra's elites could have leveraged their political and symbolic importance to foster a regional network that incentivized producers to bring agricultural surplus to the town's large population that required supplemental food. Settlements in Busayra's vicinity were likely more inclined to participate in this regional network given the lower cost of transportation and the more favorable growing conditions in the northern half of southern Jordan, while local mobile pastoralists were likely drawn to the site as a protected campsite and its availability of food and water supplies. In return, Busayra's elites could have demanded fees for access. Those settlements farther from Busayra or in more remote locations may have participated less intensively in the regional network. At times, it may have been advantageous for these communities to enter into patron-client relationships with Edom's kings. This may explain, for example, the presence of a seal impression bearing the name of Qos-gabr from the isolated mountaintop site of Umm al-Biyara (Van der Veen in Bienkowski 2011, 79–81). At other times, the same communities could have held tenuous and even adversarial relationships with Busayra. The relative lack of permanent architecture, hidden locations, and low-intensity agropastoral lifestyle evident at these sites, suggests people living in marginal locations were attempting to remain undetected while also maintaining their ability to flee or return to more mobile lifeways, if necessary.

On the other hand, proximity and contiguity do not necessarily correlate to the strength of ties within these networks, as the settlement of Tell al-Khalayfi, located 150 km to the south of Busayra on the Gulf of Aqaba, suggests. According to Danielson and Fessler (2023), the ceramic and inscriptional evidence from Phase C, including 22 stamped jar handles from relatively standardized vessels bearing reference to “Qos’anal, servant of the king” indicate the close reliance of the local elite at Tell al-Khalayfi on subsistence items shipped to the site from the

kings in Busayra. Interestingly, there are suggestions that in the earlier phase of the site (Phase B), it was under the influence of Israel and/or Judah (Danielson and Fessler 2023, 47-48; Finkelstein 2014). If true, this highlights the malleability of territory in the Iron Age Levant, as the leaders at Tell al-Khalayfi seemed to have shifted their allegiance from one distant king to another, possibly as a result of the willingness of Busayra's elite to patronize the site with agricultural goods (Qos'anal jars) and mobilized labor for the rebuilding of the site. There was one additional demand for food at Busayra that necessitated this regional agro-pastoralist network: the large number of animals passing through Busayra that participated in the long-distance trade networks that required fodder before continuing their journey. Just how this regional food network intersected with a trans-regional long-distance trade network will be considered next.

MODERATING TRANS-REGIONAL LONG-DISTANCE TRADE NETWORKS

Busayra emerged as a powerful regional node because it successfully moderated regional relationships with smaller southern Jordan settlements to support subsistence and agro-pastoralist economies. At the same time, Busayra grew powerful as a trans-regional cosmopolitan node because of the town's success in moderating relationships with groups conducting long-distance trade through the Southern Levant's arid zones (Danielson 2023). The demand for aromatics harvested from tree and bush resins in southern Arabia began in the second millennium BCE and accelerated in popularity during the first millennium BCE because of its use in ritual and luxury practices throughout the Mediterranean and Middle East (Groom 2002; Zimmerle 2014). Camel caravans transported aromatics such as frankincense and myrrh over long distances to Mesopotamia, Iran, and the Levant. Additional materials travelled through these networks such as tridacna shells that were harvested from the Red Sea (Caubet 2014). A preponderance of carved and uncarved tridacna shells at Busayra suggests that carving workshops may have been based in southern Jordan (Bienkowski 2002, 454-458).

One popular route passed through North Arabian oasis towns, continued through southwest Jordan, the Negev Desert, and terminated in Gaza, where merchants transported large quantities to Anatolia, the Aegean, and destinations deeper into the Mediterranean. Starting in the eighth century — notably around the same time that the Edomite kingdom grew visible — and in the following centuries, powerful oases arose in towns at Dedan, Duma, and Tayma (Hausleiter 2012; Charloux et al. 2021). Elites located along this route leveraged their territorial

rights over merchants to gain a stake in this lucrative market. Given Busayra's location at the junction of two roads, one leading north to Damascus and one leading west to Gaza, the town likely benefitted from passing caravans. Ascending to and descending from southern Jordan's plateau to the Jordan Rift Valley is difficult to navigate given the topographic obstacles and rocky terrain. Traders followed the different drainages that ran between Busayra and the floor of the Rift Valley, though moving large caravans through this terrain would have been challenging and possibly expensive.

The incense economy attracted the attention of Mesopotamian empires, bringing them to meddle in southern Jordan and North Arabia starting in the eighth century BCE (Hausleiter 2012, 820-824). Some have argued that it was this attention from Assyria that catalyzed the emergence of Busayra's elites (Danielson 2024, 11; Porter 2004). This influence and sponsorship from Mesopotamia, then, is reflected in the Assyrian modes of elite display found in Busayra's monumental building complex, design choices that presented the town as an "urban capital" for those passing through.

An additional change that coincided with Assyria's intervention is the appearance of settlements and material culture in the Negev Desert (Danielson 2024, 65ff; 2023, 147). These modest settlements are located in and alongside the Beer Sheva Valley, a wadi drainage that caravans entered west of the Jordan Rift Valley and followed to Gaza. Material culture, especially ceramic vessels, recovered in these settlements are similar to those found in seventh-century settlements in southern Jordan. These obvious cultural connections may indicate that Busayra's influence extended westward and the town's elites may have exercised a degree of control over the caravan routes moving through the Negev Desert.

Whether or not Edom's westward expansion at this time should be characterized as political control or cultural influence is difficult to determine. By the seventh century, however, antagonisms between Edom and Judah in the Negev were reported. Ostraca recovered from Arad, a military supply depot located along one of the routes, demonstrates Judahite concerns regarding this expansion (IM 67-631; IM 72-121, and possibly IM 72-126). As these letters date to a period following the Assyrian Empire's collapse (i.e., c. 600 BCE), Busayra's elites may have seized opportunities to assert more formal control of these trade routes following the empire's retreat. This conflict between Judah and Edom may reflect the degree to which the Assyrian

Empire exercised oversight of the arid zone's trans-regional networks. Busayra's power may have been restricted in this earlier phase.

Regardless of how "west" Edom's direct influence stretched, caravan networks entangled different polities in exchange relationships that operated at a supra-state level. Scholars have envisioned the materials that moved along these dendritic networks as frictionless, that is, outside of local and regional exchange relationships. Hostilities between Edom and Judah in the late sixth century point to the ambiguity of borders, and the likely centrality of central nodes like Busayra in negotiating and performing how far one polity's sphere of influence extended along the network. Arad and other sites in the Negev, such as Horvat Qitmit, demonstrate how outposts were used to extend and assert this influence along caravan routes. That Qos worship has been identified at Horvat Qitmit indicates that these outposts were not just oriented towards military issues, but symbolic authority as well.

The benefits of the trans-regional networks for Busayra's elites are more ambiguous. That there were economic benefits is unquestionable; however, the mechanism for those benefits is less clear. The intersection of regional and trans-regional exchange networks at Busayra created opportunities for exchange between those who were producing food for regional markets and those who were managing the infrastructure supporting long-distance trade. Strategically located at a terminal before or after caravans made the descent or ascent through the wadi drainages to the Jordan Rift Valley, Busayra was a convenient and necessary rest stop. Busayra could offer food and water for pack animals before continuing on their journey into the arid zones of the Negev Desert and Arabia. Busayra could also offer these caravans protection from the elements as well as raiding parties that may have threatened traders on their journeys. Busayra's elites may have skimmed off of the top of these exchanges, either through direct fees for access or some form of taxation.

Busayra's capacity to support long-distance caravans may explain the presence of multiple large terraces that descend off of the acropolis's northern edge into the Wadi Busayra (Porter et al. 2014). Fortification walls bound each terrace, features that required substantial amounts of labor to build and maintain. Yet, oddly, no architectural features have so far been detected in the interior of these terraces.⁷ These terraces could have housed and protected large

⁷ Today, the terraces fall on private property and are unavailable for excavation. Bennett carried out excavations next to what is now the modern road (Area H; Bienkowski 2002: 225-232).

caravans of camels, horses, and donkeys where they were fed before continuing their journey to the east or the west.⁸

CONCLUSION

Scholarship over the past century has integrated two problematic paradigms to create a vision of the Iron Age Levantine kingdom as a territorial polity. On one hand, statements made in the Hebrew Bible demarcating natural features as territorial boundaries were adopted without question to establish the borders of Iron Age polities. To some degree, the twentieth-century conflicts over political and ethnic sovereignty in the Levant tacitly inspired these concerns with ancient borders. On the other hand, scholars adopted social evolutionary models popular in archaeological research around the world to develop trait lists of features that a typical archaic state was believed to have possessed. One such feature was a political and administrative capital from which kings governed the territories that fell within their territorial borders.

While we do not question here the utility of this framework for Iron Age Levantine kingdoms such as Israel and Judah, we do question its applicability value for examining the Kingdom of Edom (Tebe 2016). We have instead sought to build on Danielson's suggestion (2023) that Edom be understood through Smith's node and corridor models that are inspired by animal behavior studies (2007). Smith is concerned that archaeologists and historians anachronistically project the territorial templates of modern nation-states onto pre-modern polities. Alternatively, territory in ancient polities should be located more narrowly within the access corridors through which resources flowed between nodes. In our analyses above, we identified two networks operating at different scales, one regional and one trans-regional, through which food, incense, animals, and luxury materials circulated.

Busayra was the fulcrum of these two networks, moderating relationships with groups who moved materials to, and through, the settlement. Busayra was the final destination for some resources, such as food and animals; for others, Busayra was a waypoint on a longer journey. What made Busayra's elites so powerful was not just their capacity to wage warfare or accumulate surplus wealth. Rather, it was their ability to leverage local resources and foster

Casual walks across the property in recent years have detected no signs of architecture visible on the surface. See Porter et al. 2014 for additional discussions about the size and design of these terraces.

⁸ In Micah 2:12, Boşrah is often likened to an animal pen or sheep fold.

ideological structures (in material and conceptual form) to create a place that drew networks toward Busayra without having to dominate them through warfare or coercion.

In short, we propose that Edom is better conceptualized as ruling over people and places linked through regional and trans-regional networks of various kinds (exchange, political, kinship, ritual, etc.). As a central node in these networks, its newly accumulated wealth allowed its emergent elite and constituent community to construct an Iron Age polity. Returning to the comments in this volume's introduction, the people of Busayra engaged in polity-making practices such as the erection of monumental and collective architecture, collection of fees from passing caravans and mobile communities, distribution of subsistence goods (Type E jars, Qos'anal jars), and participation in ritual practices that fostered a shared identity (Area A Building). These actions were made intelligible through principles like kingship and Qos-worship, and were stabilized within the highly symbolic and newly built-up landscape of temples, palaces, gates, fortifications, moats, etc. as well as within the multitude of new settlements founded in southern Jordan in the 8th to 6th centuries BCE.

That particular nodes could exit and unravel the networks upon which Busayra built its polity is indicated by the ambiguity of the political affiliation of remote mountaintop settlements, as well the contested and fuzzy status of border towns between kingdoms (Tall al-Khalayfi; Negev settlements). Stability of networks thus required the careful maintenance of political and economic relationships between Busayra and its clients.

That Busayra was largely successful in this role is suggested by Nabonidus' conquest of the town in the mid-sixth century. Busayra did not pose a military threat to the Babylonian king and did not warrant the level of destruction that the town received. Busayra's destruction gave Nabonidus the opportunity to redirect these networks in his favor. Nabonidus's cliff relief at nearby Sela' can therefore be read as a statement in which he visually inserted himself as a new moderator over the trans-regional relationships of the Southern Levant (Da Riva 2020).

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