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One Tale, Two ‘Aṭarūz: Investigating Rujm ‘Aṭarūz and its Association with Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz

In the land of Jabal Banī Ḥamīdah are two ancient ruins that have the same name: Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz and Rujm ‘Aṭarūz. The former stands for a large settlement at the heart of the west side of the region while Rujm ‘Aṭarūz is a fortress site, roughly 3.5 km east of Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz, on a medium-sized rocky hill by the road between Libb and Machaerus (Mukāwir).

Of the two sites, Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz has been the target of systematic excavations for the past 12 years (Ji 2011; 2012a; 2012b; Ji and Bates 2013). According to the results, it was a major cultic and urban center in the 9th century BC that was probably built and maintained by a national or at least regional political entity. The large temple complex was well laid out, centrally located and built at the highest point of the site. Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz was rebuilt and reused in the late 9th - 7th centuries BC. Kitchen remains, storage facilities and water channels suggest that the site was primarily adapted for domestic purposes, but the eastern part of the earlier temple complex and its nearby courtyard were continuously used for cultic purposes at least until the early 8th century BC. In late Iron II, the site was abandoned, with a settlement gap continuing until the Hellenistic period. The Hellenistic - early Roman settlement at Khirbat

‘Aṭarūz was a thriving agricultural village as well as an industrial center, probably with specialization in wine and oil production.

In contrast to Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz, however, little is as yet known about Rujm ‘Aṭarūz. The early examination by Glueck (1939) produced evidence of an ancient fortress at the site, along with Iron Age pottery; the fortress was described as a military outpost of Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz. This view was echoed in Dearman’s (1989) historical and geographical reconstruction of the Mesha inscription: Rujm ‘Aṭarūz was defined here again as an observation watchtower for the city of Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz. The suggestion by Glueck and Dearman is likely correct except for the qualification that it still requires archaeological evidence demonstrating that Rujm ‘Aṭarūz was associated with Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz.

The aim of this paper is to fill this research gap by preliminarily reporting the results of archaeological research of Rujm ‘Aṭarūz in 2004, 2008 and 2013. The findings seem to support the view that Rujm ‘Aṭarūz was built by the inhabitants of Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz in the 9th century BC. Its construction was probably related to the main ancient road system that linked Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz with the Transjordan plateau and the King’s Highway on the plateau.

Survey

Rujm ‘Aṭarūz is situated on a natural mound commanding an excellent view across the road from Libb (east) and Machaerus (west), as well as over any approaches from Wādī az-Zarqā’ Main in the north and Sayl al-Hīdān in the south. As stated above, it was formerly explored by Glueck (1939: 135-136) who reported the site being located “on the top of a high hill, visible all the way from the section of the central highway through Transjordan east of this point... The hill is almost completely isolated, being accessible only by a narrow saddle on the s. w. side and a narrow ridge on the n. e. side leading to the hill beyond it.” Glueck’s description of the mound and its surrounding topography is pretty accurate in that Rujm ‘Aṭarūz is, indeed, visible at a far distance from all directions and that it is accessible mainly from two saddles, one each on the east and west, but challenging to do so from the other directions.

In 2004 and 2008, Rujm ‘Aṭarūz became a subject of archaeological studies in the course of the Jabal Banī Ḥamīdah regional survey, which was followed by another survey in 2013. The site, as indicated by topography and sherd coverage, measures approximately 100 × 150 m. Sherds were relatively sparse on the surface. Notwithstanding three visitations to the site, the surface surveys produced only 95 pottery

sherds, including 11 diagnostic sherds primarily attributable to Iron II, late Hellenistic and early Roman.

The site is characterized by ruins of a large ancient fortress at its high point (see FIGS. 1-3). Modern building activity at the site bulldozed and destroyed almost one-third of the entire mound on which the fortress stood. The north-east and north-west corners of the fortress, however, still remain in excellent condition, as does the northern wall (Wall 2) between the two corners (see FIGS. 4 and 5). Also, two exterior wall lines extend southward from the north-east and north-west corners of the structure. The investigation on the line of these eastern (Wall 3) and western (Wall 1) walls has established the existence of a square-type fortress at Rujm ‘Aṭarūz, even though the southern half of the fortress building is very poorly preserved. As for the southern side of the mound, a bulldozer almost completely demolished the once-existing southern wall (Wall 4) of the fortress, as well as most of the area between Walls 1 and 3 (see FIG. 6).

According to the surveys, the fortress seems to have been built to a single plan, enjoying the natural protection provided by the height of the hillock. It was constructed of roughly hewn limestone blocks; its exterior walls were roughly 1.5 m thick. The fortress is estimated to have

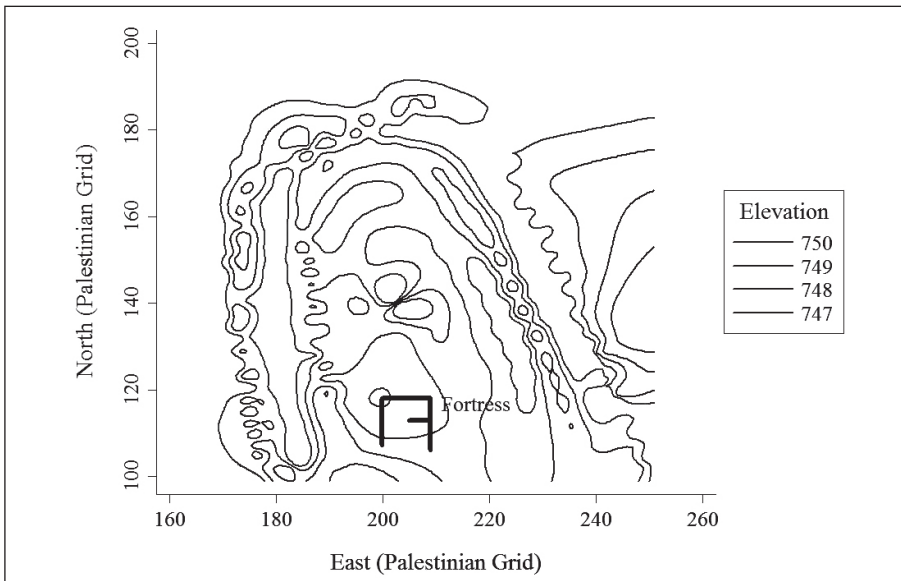


1. Rujm ‘Aṭarūz, looking east.

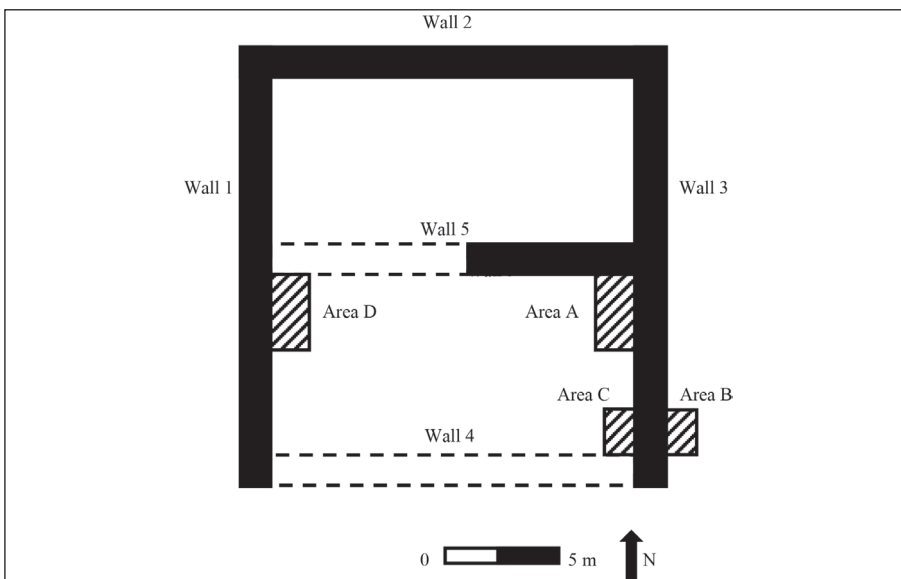
INVESTIGATING RUJM 'AṬARŪZ AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH KHIRBAT 'AṬARŪZ



2. Ruin of the Rujm 'Aṭarūz fortress, looking south.



3. Contour map and location of the fortress



4. Schematic plan of the Rujm 'Aṭarūz Fortress with sound-ing areas.



5. North-east corner of the Rujm 'Aṭarūz fortress, looking south.



6. Southern section of the Rujm 'Aṭarūz fortress, looking north-west.

been *ca* 17.5 × 18 m in size and stood up to at least 3.6 m above the ground. Our measurement is similar to what was described by Glueck (1939: 136): the fortress was “in such a ruined condition that it was difficult to obtain any accurate measurements of its size, but it seems to measure about 19 by 18 m.” Interestingly enough, Glueck (1939: 136) further claimed that the fortress was “strengthened by a glacis built against its wall. At the n.e. corner the glacis is 2.3 m. thick at the base, and rises to a height of 4.5 m. against the wall.” The survey team attempted to corroborate Glueck’s account

of the glacis as well as establishing the size of the fortress. All our efforts, however, availed us little in tracing any fortification installations outside the exterior walls. There is little of the glacis left, if it was once present around the fortress proper.

Our investigation also shows that a thick interior wall (Wall 5) may have divided the fortress into northern and southern sections. The northern half of the fortress is presently well-preserved and filled with a mass of rocks and stones. Perhaps, in antiquity, this section functioned as a podium, watchtower or look-

out installation for military purposes. On the other hand, it is difficult to reconstruct the precise plan of the southern half, yet it appears to have been utilized for residence and domestic activities in view of the evidence of beaten earth floors, cooking activities, storage jars and traces of what seem to be a couple of wall lines inside the area (see below).

Salvage Soundings

In the summer of 2004, shortly after a thorough surface survey of the site, a brief but intensive excavation around the bulldozed area was carried out under the author's supervision. Such salvage sounding efforts were perceived as urgent and inevitable, as continuous agricultural and architectural development at the site had already destroyed about 75 % of the southern half of the fortress remains. In this context, four small excavation squares, designated Areas A – D, were opened on the south side of the fortress (see FIG. 4). Stratigraphic evidence was found in Areas A and D.

Area A is a 1.5×3 m square defined by Wall 5 in the north and the main fortress wall (Wall 4) in the east. This area, along with Area D, pertains to a rather small non-bulldozed section inside the fortress building. In Area A, a beaten earth floor (Field Phase [FP] A4) was revealed under thick, light-brown soil deposits (FP A3, *ca* 60 cm thick). Above this deposit was another soil layer of darker brown color (FP A2, *ca* 20 cm thick) under stone debris (FP A1, *ca* 50 cm thick) from the fortress building. The soil layer of FP A2 contained several mid - late Iron II pottery sherds. The exposed floor from FP A4 was partially burnt and mixed with *ṭābūn* fragments and moderate amounts of ash. The finds from this floor and the FP A3 soil deposits included a number of pottery body sherds, mostly from jars or *pithoi*, apart from a dozen diagnostic early Iron II storage jar rims. The floor thereby is most likely to have been used for storage and cooking during the early Iron II era, perhaps with a *ṭābūn* near the corner of Wall 3 and Wall 5.

Parallel to Area A and *ca* 12 m west was Area D (1.5×3 m), corresponding to the north-west corner of the fort's southern section. As in Area A, the initial phase of the work mainly involved clearance of soil and rock debris (FP D1, *ca* 30 cm thick) until late Hellenistic and early Roman sherds were discovered inside a soil layer (FP D2) under the debris. The soil layer was about 30 cm thick and was strong brown in color. Under this soil layer was another soil layer (FP D3, *ca* 50 cm thick). Early Iron II sherds were characteristic of the small pottery assemblage from this soil layer, indicating that it belonged to the early Iron II period.

Located near the southern end of the fortress building, Area C was a 1×2 m square opened to investigate archaeological deposits below the partly bulldozed surface near the potential south-east corner of the fortress. This square was laid out *ca* 3 m south of Area A, alongside Wall 4 inside the fortress building. On the other hand, Area B represents a 1×2 m square opened outside the fortress building. A couple of early Iron II sherds were found in Area C (FP C2, under the stone debris of FP C1) while Area B yielded no ceramic evidence. It appears that bedrock and the bottom of the fortress wall were reached in both squares. The bottom of Wall 3 was measured about 1 m lower in elevation than the FP A4 floor found in Area A. These findings suggest that the fortress was constructed on bedrock early in the Iron II period.

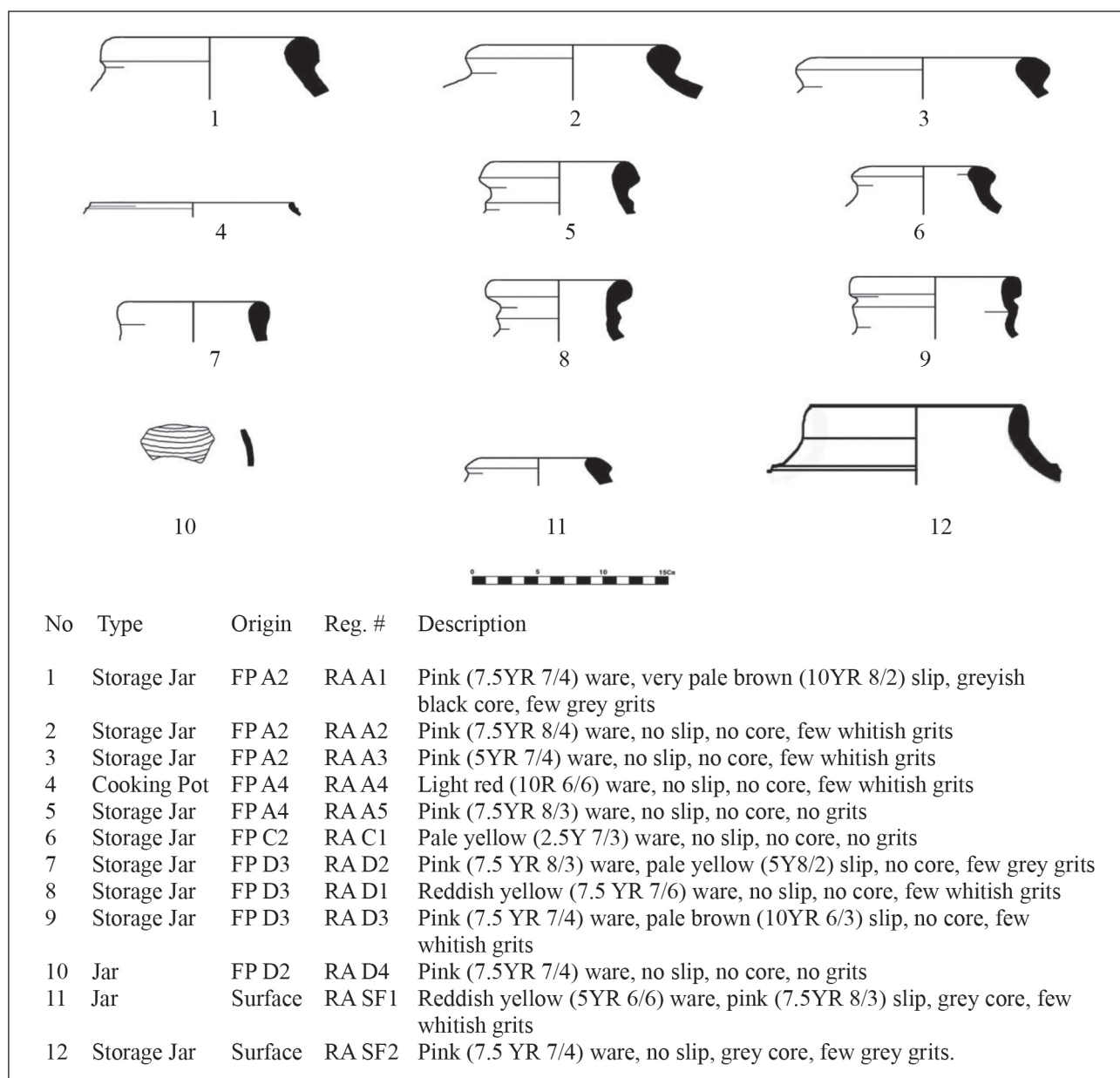
Put together, archaeological soundings at Rujm 'Aṭarūz yielded three possible stratified settlement periods ranging in date from Iron Age II to the late Hellenistic - early Roman period. The earliest period (Settlement Period I: FP A4 - A3, FP C2 and FP D3) is tentatively dated to the early Iron II period. A military fortress was founded at the site during this first settlement period and continued in use through the second occupational phase (Settlement Period II: FP A2) that is ascribed to the mid - late Iron II period. The site was subsequently deserted until the late Hellenistic - early Roman

period (Settlement Period III: FP D2) when new settlers arrived and reused the fortress and its adjacent residential facilities.

Pottery

For more exact dating of the three settlement phases, selected pottery sherds from Rujm ‘Aṭarūz are presented in FIG. 7. Beginning with pottery from Area A, Figure 7:1 illustrates a thickened storage jar rim that is the direct extension of its sharply inclined neck and shoulder. This type of storage jar was popular during the mid - late Iron II period, with a peak

in the 7th century BC horizon (Gitin 1990: 143; pl. 26:16). Figures 7:2 and 7:3 are characterized by a knob rim and short neck that is inclined inwards. This form is most often found in the context of the 8th - 7th centuries BC, with its debut in the early Iron II period (Gitin 1990: 126; Sauer and Herr 2012: 111). Potential parallels are noticed at Beer Sheba (Aharoni 1973: pl. 55:13), Gezer (Gitin 1990: pl. 26:8), Hazor (Yadin *et al.* 1959: pl. 47:25) and Ḥisbān (Sauer and Herr 2012: fig. 2.26:3). Figures 7:1-3 are all associated with FP A2, corresponding to Settlement Period II.



7. Selected pottery from Rujm ‘Aṭarūz.

A cooking pot in Figure 7:4 comes from FP A4, which is mostly dated to the late 10th - mid 9th centuries BC on the basis of its ridged and inverted rim with a triangular exterior formed by rolling end-point upwards. Similar forms are attested to at Bethsaida (Arav 1999: pl. IV:10), Beth Shean (Mazar 2006: 342, pl. 12:20), Gezer (Gitin 1990: pl. 14:3), Hazor (Yadin *et al.* 1960: pl. LVIII: 2), Ḥisbān (Sauer and Herr 2012: figs 2.18:2, 2.22:9), Jezreel (Zimhoni 1997: fig. 1.6:3) and Lachish (Zimhoni 1997: fig. 3.38:7). The storage jars in Figures 7:5 and 7:6 originate in FP A4 and FP C2 respectively. They have a thickened rim and a ridge at the mid-point on their inwardly inclined neck. This form most commonly appears in mid 9th century BC contexts (Gitin 1990: 120-121). Clear parallels to our assemblage are ubiquitous at Dor (Gilboa 1995: pl. 1.6:4), Gezer (Gitin 1990: pls 12:4-5, 14:10, 18:3-4), Hazor (Yadin *et al.* 1960: pl. LX:1-8), Jezreel (Zimhoni 1997: fig. 1.5:8) and Lachish (Zimhoni 1997: fig. 3.53:1, 4 and 5). FP A4 and FP C2 are pertinent to the site's earliest occupational phase (Settlement Period I).

Turning to Area D, Figure 7 includes three FP D3 pottery examples (Figures 7:7-9) related to Settlement Period I. The storage jar-type in FIG. 7:7 is mainly associated with the 10th - 8th centuries BC. It has a slightly thickened rim with a neck inclined inwards, without a ridge at the mid-point. This example is reminiscent of the storage jars from Gezer (Gitin 1990: pls 15:11-12, 16:1), Jezreel (Zimhoni 1997: fig. 1.4:9), Lachish (Zimhoni 1997: fig. 3.50:5) and possibly Ḥisbān (Sauer and Herr 2012: fig. 2.23:7). Figures 7:8 and 7:9 illustrate storage jars with a rounded or square-type rim and a vertical neck with a pronounced ridge at the mid-point. These sherds represent a variation of the typical ridged-neck storage jars in FIGS. 7:5 and 7:6, typologically corresponding to those from 9th century strata at Beth Shean (Mazar 2006: pl. 10:2 and 3), Ḥisbān (Ray 2001: fig. 3.5:4; Sauer and Herr 2012: fig. 2.20:5) and

Jezreel (Zimhoni 1997: fig. 1.4:8).

Figure 7:10 is a body sherd with grooves on its exterior, which is slightly thicker and cruder in quality than typical early Roman body sherds with grooves. This type of body sherd usually belongs to late Hellenistic - early Roman cylindrical or bag-shaped jars that were especially frequent in 1st century BC ceramic assemblages (*e.g.* Bar-Nathan 1981: 54-57). The pottery presented here is from FP D2, which is aligned with Settlement Period III.

Also depicted in FIG. 7 are two sample sherds discovered on the surface during site surveys. Figure 7:11 is an externally thickened jar rim with a straight neck inclined inwards. It is related to a common jar-type of the 9th - 8th century BC horizon as demonstrated at Gezer (Gitin pls 15:13, 18:5). Figure. 7:12 represents an early and mid Iron II collared-rim storage jar that continued the collared-rim *pithos* tradition of Iron Age I (*e.g.* Clark 2002: figs 4.17-26). Our example is characterized by a thickened rim and relatively short neck with a distinctive collar-rim at the base of the neck, which are the typological hallmarks of early - mid Iron II assemblages (Ji 1997, 1998). This type is common throughout Iron II sites in Transjordan and the Jordan valley, *viz.* Bālū' (Worschech 1992: 149-155), Beth Shean (James 1966: fig. 70:6), Buseirah (Bennett 1975: fig. 8:7), 'Irāq al-'Amīr (Ji 1998: fig. 2:1; Lapp 1989: 288), Amman citadel (Dornemann 1983: fig. 57:629), Ḥisbān (Lawlor 1991: fig. 3.29:1), Jericho (Kenyon and Holland 1982: fig. 207:43-44) and 'Umayrī (Herr 1989: fig. 19.12:14).

To summarize, although Rujm 'Aṭarūz might not be particularly rich in pottery, sufficient remains to make a provisional suggestion about the ceramic chronology of the site. Further, the ceramic data align with stratigraphic evidence found in Areas A and D. As a whole, the ceramic assemblage at Rujm 'Aṭarūz seems to be dominated by Iron II pottery sherds classified into two sub-periods: the 9th century BC and 8th - 7th centuries BC. The 9th century corpus

is associated with FP A4-A3, FP C2 and FP D3 (Settlement Period I), whereas the mid - late Iron II period of the 8th - 7th centuries BC is demonstrated in FP A2 (Settlement Period II). Beyond Iron Age II, Rujm ‘Aṭarūz contains some ceramic and stratigraphic evidence from FP D2 (Settlement Period III) that can be attributed to the late Hellenistic - early Roman period.

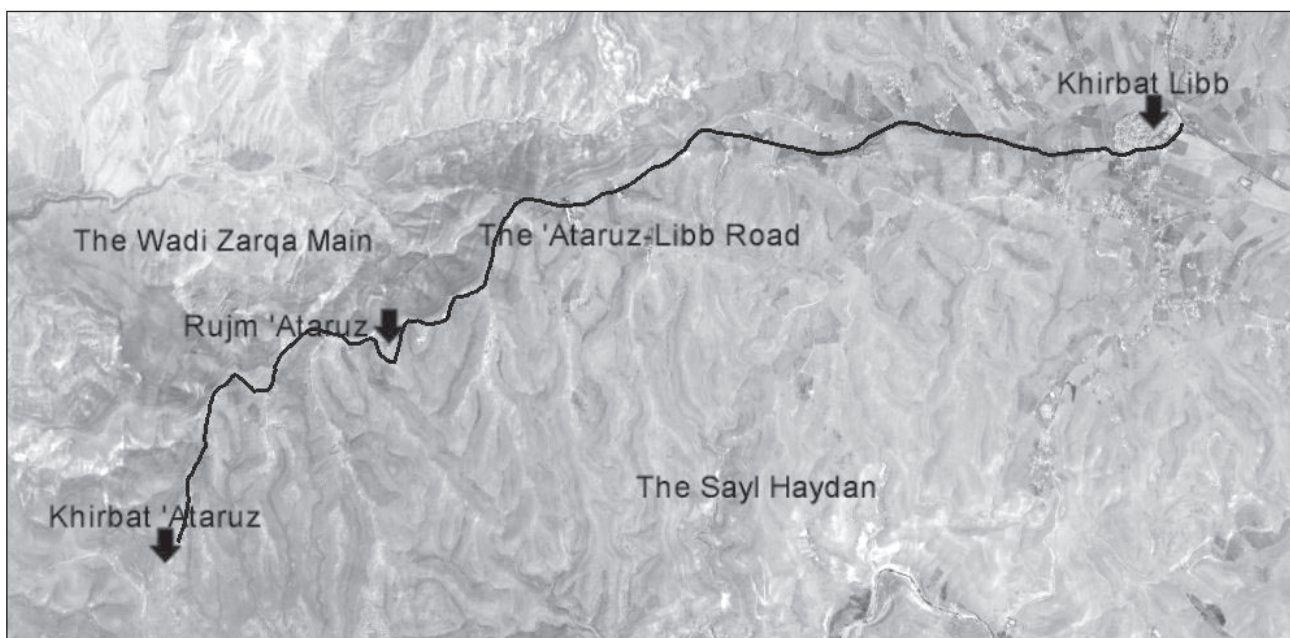
This combination of ceramic and stratigraphic data leads to the tentative suggestion that Rujm ‘Aṭarūz was constructed in the 9th century BC (Settlement Period I) and remained in use during the 8th - 7th centuries BC as well (Settlement Period II). During these Iron II periods, the northern part of the fortress was used primarily as a look-out podium or watchtower, while the evidence of probable domestic installations and wall-lines extending southwards from the podium posits that there were small, dependent populations residing on the south side of the fortress. The late Hellenistic fill above the Iron II strata further suggests that Rujm ‘Aṭarūz was resettled in the 1st century BC (Settlement Period III), presumably while still being used as a military outpost for late Hellenistic - early Roman towns in the region of Jabal Banī Ḥamīdah, such as ‘Aṭarūz, Machaerus and Qurayyāt.

Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz and the Road System

The construction of Rujm ‘Aṭarūz is likely to have been linked to the presence of an east - west road that passed through the Jabal Banī Ḥamīdah region during the Iron II - early Roman periods. Of courses, it is difficult to determine the exact course of this ancient road, yet there are archaeological reasons to believe that it approximately followed the course of the modern paved road that connects the town of Jabal Banī Ḥamīdah with the modern village of Libb (see FIGS. 8 and 9).

The present road, after passing just south of the village center of Libb, proceeds about 4 km westward, traversing shallow valleys and flat fertile fields. The road then arrives at the watershed between Wādī az-Zarqā’ Mā‘īn and Sayl al-Hīdān, one that stretches about 7.5 km westward all the way to Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz. From the watershed point, the road has several ascents and descents, as well as twists and turns, but generally follows the watershed, keeping to its northern edge because north and south of this ridge steep slopes and deep valleys virtually eliminate the possibility of alternative major east - west routes.

The antiquity of this modern road is supported by the fact that at either end of



8. Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz, Rujm ‘Aṭarūz and Khirbat Libb on Google Earth.



9. The modern Libb - Machaerus Road: view from Rujm ‘Aṭarūz, looking east.

the section stands a major Iron II - early Roman ruin: Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz in the west and Khirbat Libb in the east. Khirbat Libb sits on a pronounced hill at the crossroads where the Rujm ‘Aṭarūz road branches to the west from the ancient King’s Highway. In 2004, this site was surveyed by the author, who documented traces of multiple ancient buildings and wall-lines among recent stone and concrete houses. Further, the site contained a large number of Iron II, late Hellenistic and early Roman pottery sherds, indicating that it was occupied during the Iron II and Hellenistic - early Roman periods. Consistent with this finding were the results of Glueck’s survey (1934: 32), which also collected plenty of Iron II and Roman pottery sherds at Khirbat Libb. Likewise, as noted earlier, Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz was a major settlement in the Iron II and late Hellenistic - early Roman periods (Ji 2011, 2012b; Ji and Bates 2013). Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz was founded at the beginning of Iron II and lasted about two centuries or more

before it was re-established as a settlement site in the late Hellenistic period after a long occupational gap that lasted from the late Iron II period to the early Hellenistic period.

Rujm ‘Aṭarūz is situated on a high hillock just by this ancient road, guarding the most prominent geographical bottleneck on the entire road system east of Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz. This location, compared to other high points along the road, would have given far better control over the approach from the east, offering early warning and protection to the western Jabal Banī Ḥamīdah region around 3.5 km east of the city of Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz. The site’s position thereby explains the fortress’ strategic importance for Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz. It was built to oversee and control traffic along the road, as well as to operate as a gateway installation in relation to the defence of the city and its vicinity.

Having said that, it is important to note that Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz and Rujm ‘Aṭarūz display high levels of similarity in relation to Iron

II - early Roman settlement history, which deserves attention by persons interested in the archaeology of Rujm 'Aṭarūz (Ji 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Ji and Bates 2013). First, when the two sites are compared, the initial settlement period of Rujm 'Aṭarūz appears to correspond closely to the early Iron II period at Khirbat 'Aṭarūz. In this period, Khirbat 'Aṭarūz was an important cultic and urban center that contained a large building-complex comprised of various religious, domestic and public installations, as well as solid defensive walls and a moat that surrounded the entire city. Second, Khirbat 'Aṭarūz was reused after violent destruction in the mid 9th century BC, as demonstrated by several successive strata attributable to the period of late 9th - 7th centuries BC. This mid - late Iron II period dovetails with the second settlement phase at Rujm 'Aṭarūz. Third, Khirbat 'Aṭarūz was resettled in the late Hellenistic period following an occupational hiatus where the Hellenistic - early Roman period is evidenced by well-built residential houses, cooking facilities, storage installations, a public bath and possibly wine or olive presses. This era is, once again, represented at Rujm 'Aṭarūz through its final settlement period.

At this point, we should bear in mind that Khirbat 'Aṭarūz was always of a much higher status throughout the periods under consideration than Rujm 'Aṭarūz in terms of size, population, economic prosperity and social significance. Rujm 'Aṭarūz would likely have had a mainly military reason for existence given its size, location and environment. If so, granted the parallel settlement history of the two sites, it would be not difficult to see the vicissitude of Rujm 'Aṭarūz being accounted for by the settlement history of Khirbat 'Aṭarūz.

In this vein, it is informative to note that the early Iron II period witnessed the emergence of an impressive defense system around Khirbat 'Aṭarūz (Ji 2011). The investigation in Field D at Khirbat 'Aṭarūz, for instance, excavated portions of the enclosure stone wall that once

surrounded the entire city of Khirbat 'Aṭarūz. This wall was constructed of undressed blocks of local limestone, was three rows (measuring *ca* 80 cm) wide and currently stands five courses high to a height of 1 m. The wall system was apparently built to protect the city, as was the dry moat dug outside of the defense wall. Ceramic forms associated with the defensive wall included early Iron II bowls and storage jars that were characteristic of the site's second temple period, the early and mid 9th century BC, demonstrating that the city was fortified during the peak days of Iron Age cultic and building activities at Khirbat 'Aṭarūz.

Likewise, the ceramic and stratigraphic data point to the 9th century BC as the probable building date for the fortress at Rujm 'Aṭarūz as well. That is, the erection of Rujm 'Aṭarūz fits chronologically into the creation of the defensive system at Khirbat 'Aṭarūz. This coincidence might not be fortuitous. It rather implies that a fortress was built at Rujm 'Aṭarūz as part of a regional defence plan deployed by the residents of Khirbat 'Aṭarūz in the early - mid 9th century BC. An ancient city was only rarely protected by stone walls around the city alone, but more commonly by a combination of the city's fortification system and smaller fortified towns or military installations built around and nearby. In this context, it seems plausible to assume that the founding of Rujm Ataruz was a means of territorial protection and regional security that the inhabitants of Khirbat 'Aṭarūz attempted to achieve concurrently with the fortification of their city.

Summary

In view of the evidence available to date, it seems reasonable to suggest that Rujm 'Aṭarūz was constructed as a military outpost in the early or mid 9th century BC by the residents of Khirbat 'Aṭarūz, a center of great cultic and public importance in the region during the period. Rujm 'Aṭarūz was in continuous use in the 8th - 7th centuries BC when Khirbat 'Aṭarūz

came back to full life after a violent destruction of the city in the mid - late 9th century BC. During these Iron II periods, the fortress’ northern part might have been utilized as a look-out podium or watchtower, whereas the southern side of the building was used for residence and domestic activities. The late Hellenistic - early Roman debris fill above the Iron II strata suggest that Rujm ‘Aṭarūz was likely employed for the same purpose for the last time during the periods of 1st century BC and possibly 1st century AD.

In antiquity, the location of Rujm ‘Aṭarūz was apparently chosen not only because of its proximity to the city of Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz, but also because of its strategic position on a prominent hill by the road system that connected the city to the King’s Highway. The Rujm ‘Aṭarūz road was pivotal for the socio-economic prosperity of Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz and its vicinity because it was the only major east - west thoroughfare that directly linked the area with the Transjordan plateau to the east. At the hill of Rujm ‘Aṭarūz, the road passes by a conspicuous topographical bottleneck, a high mound guarding the saddle-bottom of the road’s ascent into the hills just east of Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz. The residents of Khirbat ‘Aṭarūz seems to have found in this location the key to the defence of their city and region as well as the socio-economic development of the entire Jabal Banī Ḥamīdah area.

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