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# The Architecture of Edom

The best historical sources for southern Jordan in the second and early first millennia BC are Egyptian (Kitchen 1992). It is in these sources, at the end of the Late Bronze Age (c. 1200 BC), that we first meet the terms Edom and Seir — Seir was apparently a term for part of Edom, which later became synonymous with Edom. Eventually, the kingdom of Edom, as we know it from Old Testament accounts, extended from Wādī al-Ḥasā in the north to Wādī Ḥismā in the south, and in its later history Edom extended west across Wādī 'Arabah (Bartlett 1989: 33ff.). At the end of the Late Bronze Age, though, there is nothing to suggest that the term "Edom" meant anything more than an area — there is no indication at all that Edom was an independent kingdom under its own ruler.

Present archaeological evidence suggests that at this time Edom was largely non-settled, although there may have been some settled occupation in the Iron I (c.1220-1000 BC) in the north, on the banks of Wādī al-Ḥasā in the best agricultural land. The biblical evidence suggests a degree of centralisation in Edom by the mid-ninth century BC. Although the lack of a single complete excavated Iron Age sequence in Edom precludes a definitive chronology, present evidence suggests that the bulk of the settlement sites do not predate the seventh century BC. It is only at this point that we can talk confidently of an Edomite state (Bienkowski 1992).

The factors leading to Edomite statehood were the stability of Assyrian control and improved economic opportunities (Bienkowski 1992). The economic opportunities were the resumption of mining at Faynān in the Iron II period (certainly by the seventh century BC but possibly in about 900 BC according to recent C14 dates; cf. Hauptmann and Weisgerber 1992) and the Arabian trade in luxury goods, particularly frankincense, which cannot be firmly dated before the eighth or seventh centuries BC, although it may have been in place earlier (Bienkowski 1992: 9, n. 7).

Edom first paid tribute to the Assyrians in the reign of Adadnirari III in 796 BC, and became an Assyrian vassal

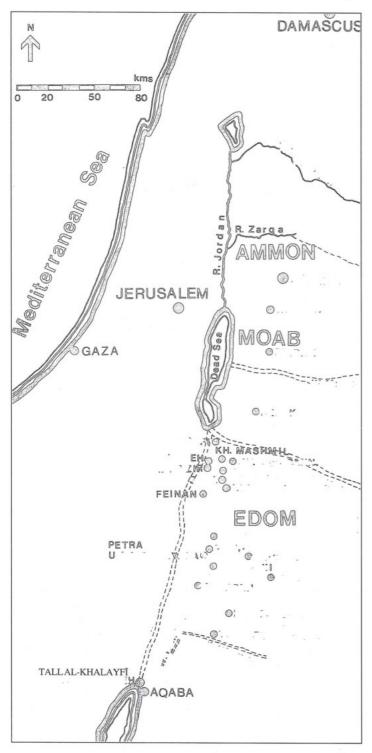
following Tiglathpileser III's campaign in 734 BC. However, Edom retained its independence and autonomy, and there is little evidence of direct Assyrian involvement in Edomite affairs (Millard 1992). On present evidence, it was only under Ashurbanipal in about 660 BC that Assyrian troops actually entered Edom - and even that evidence can be questioned. There is no evidence of Assyrian forts and garrisons throughout Edom, or indeed any of the other Transjordanian states, as has often been claimed (Bienkowski 1992: 3-5). So long as the vassal state paid its tribute regularly and its king appeared when required, Assyria would not interfere in its affairs. Indirect Assyrian influences might well appear in the material culture of those states, but these are selective borrowings which do not imply a permanent, institutionalised Assyrian presence. But overall Assyrian control did have a stabilising effect: the system of vassaldom prevented fighting between vassal states, and the economies were a little more settled because the Assyrian requirements for tribute meant that they had to generate a stated amount each year to send to Assyria or risk a punitive campaign. So once the Assyrians had established a network of vassal states bordering their provinces, this would have produced a degree of political and economic stability which no doubt contributed to national development in the Transjordanian vassal states (Millard 1992).

Nevertheless, Edom never became fully urban. The only settlement site that might be called "urban" is Busayra (Buseirah), probably the Edomite capital, which is a special case. The remainder of the settlements in Edom, which date to the seventh and sixth centuries BC, were mostly open villages and farms, sometimes located on almost inaccessible mountain tops. So far, none of the sites which Nelson Glueck identified as Iron Age "border forts" in Edom has been excavated, so we do not know if they were really forts or if they were even occupied in the Iron Age — but the evidence for a "string" of border forts is not compelling (Bienkowski 1992: 4). Furthermore, it is probable that a proportion of Edom's pop-

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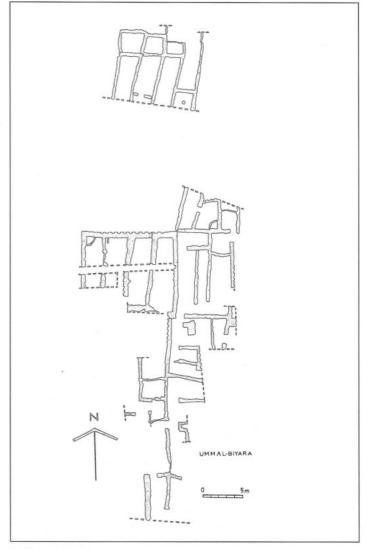
ulation remained pastoralist and non-settled.

Apart from Buṣayra, the excavated sites south of Wādī al-Ḥasā which have definite Iron II architecture are: Umm al-Biyāra, Ṭawīlānō Tall al-Khalayfī (Kheleifeh) and Ghrāra (FIGS. 1-4); from surveys we can also add some data from Khirbat al-Mughayṭa, Khirbat 'Ishra, Ba'ja III, as-Sāda (Umm al-'Ula) and Jabal al-Quṣayr

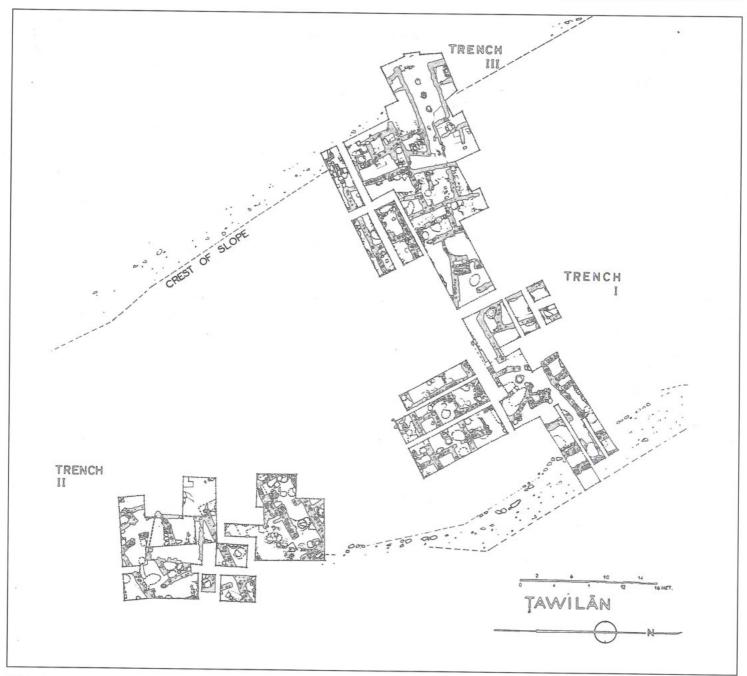


1. Map of Edom and surrounding areas.

(Bienkowski 1990; Hart 1987; 1988; Pratico 1985; 1993; Lindner 1992; forthcoming). Although many details of plans are different, there are some common characteristics in the architecture of these sites, which in many ways do not differ from the general Iron Age tradition of the southern Levant. The environmental setting of Edomite sites lends itself to building in stone rather than mudbrick. Invariably there are dry-stone masonry walls, normally one course wide, of irregularly sized and roughly dressed stones, irregularly snecked. Large stones often rested on smaller ones. There is some evidence for the use of plaster on walls. At Tawilan, one house is particularly well built, with a wall two courses wide and stone paving (FIG. 3, Trench II north), although generally floors were on bedrock with occasional plastering or packing. Pillars were occasionally used, for example at Tawilan and Ghrāra (FIGS. 3-4), the main building at the latter having a central pillared courtyard. The pillars - a standard Palestinian Iron Age form — would probably have been



2. Umm al-Biyāra.

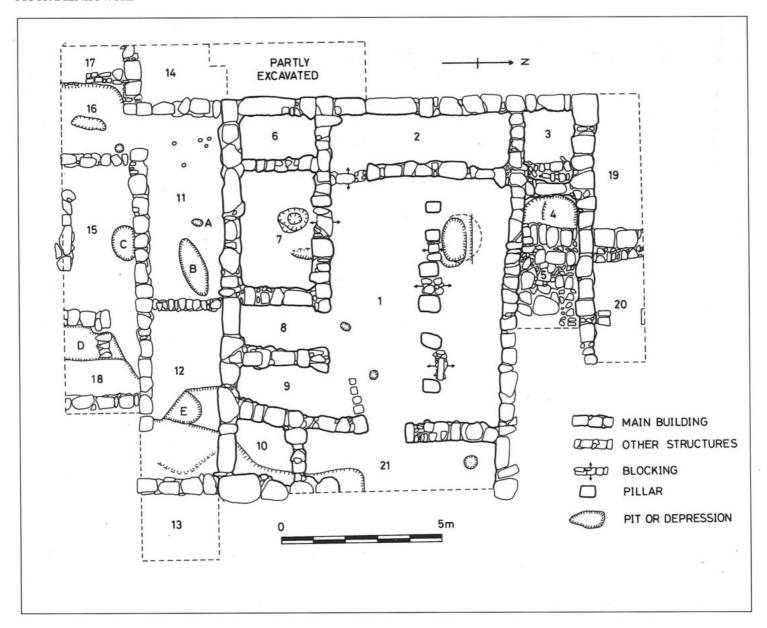


3. Țawīlān: plan of major areas.

roof supports, but they are not very stable and are unlikely to have carried either a very heavy or a large roof. Building plans are generally rectangular, sometimes with long corridor-like rooms with smaller rooms adjoining, although within this there was considerable variation. At Ṭawīlān alone there were four types of building plan, and some of the walls may have been no more than partitions (FIG. 3). The three large enclosures with massive walls at Khirbat al-Mughayṭa, possibly for animals, recall the plan of Iron II Mishor Haruah in an-Naqab (Hart 1987: 38-42 and FIG. 10; cf. Braemer 1982: 265-266). Ghrāra had towers at the corners of its main building (FIG. 4). All

these sites seem to have been agricultural and domestic, in general, judging from the presence of querns, grinding stones, loom weights, spindle whorls and cisterns.

Umm al-Biyāra (FIG. 2), Ba'ja III, as-Sādah and Jabal al-Quṣayr are linked in that they are all "mountain-top" sites in or near Petra, and their Iron Age pottery was overwhelmingly plain, with little or no painted pottery—at other Edomite sites painted pottery is plentiful. This might be due to a chronological factor, and on this basis Stephen Hart has suggested that painted decoration on Edomite pottery did not become common until after the Umm al-Biyāra settlement ended, possibly in about



4. Ghrāra, Area A (from Hart 1988: 92, FIG. 3).

the mid-seventh century BC (Hart 1989: 78, 82). While this remains a possibility, there are other factors to be considered. A regional difference is discounted, since nearby Ṭawīlān had a high percentage of painted pottery. A difference based on site location is a possibility: all four are on high mountains; at as-Sādah, Jabal al-Quṣayr and Umm al-Biyāra there are large rectangular buildings with long corridor rooms (Zeitler 1992; Lindner forthcoming), perhaps reflecting the paucity of timber for roofing; while at Ba'ja III and as-Sādah other habitations were rock shelters. Explaining this difference is another matter, but the remote location and difficult access may suggest deliberate inaccessibility and seclusion from the sites on the Edomite plateau, and from any centralised control from the capital Buṣayra. In any case, we do not

know how centralised a state Edom ever became, and there is much to suggest that statehood — and by implication central control — was fairly superficial (cf. Knauf 1992: 52).

Tall al-Khalayfi, about 500 m from the north shore of the Gulf of 'Aqaba, remains an enigma. Pratico's reappraisal (1985; 1993) proposes two major occupational phases: a casemate fortress with a six-roomed building in the centre; and a fortified settlement in an insets/offsets design with a four-chambered gate. All the construction is in mudbrick. The dating is still fairly flexible, but appears to be between the eighth and sixth centuries BC, although the end-date may even go down as far as c. 400 BC (Sauer, pers. comm.). Whether or not al-Khalayfi was an Edomite foundation is debatable: if

we restrict Edom proper to the area north of Wādī Ḥismā (Bartlett 1989: 34), then al-Khalayfi was not technically in Edom, although in an age of ever-changing boundaries that did not mean very much. Pratico has compared the casemate fortress to the an-Naqab fortresses, but has called the groundplan "chronologically, functionally, and typologically irrelevant" (1985: 15; 1993: 31). Bartlett suggests that the fortified settlement represents an Edomite rebuilding (1989: 125, 133-134), but again there are similarities with Arad, Tall al-Qudayrat and Horvat 'Uza in an-Naqab (Pratico 1985: 15ff.; 1993: 28-31). The function and origins of al-Khalayfi remain uncertain. Bartlett has called it a fortified caravanserai (1989: 36). It may have been connected with the Arabian trade: although the route of the Arabian trade through Transjordan in the Iron Age is speculative, in later periods Elath was one of the links on the route between Ma'an and Egypt and Gaza (Eph'al 1982: 14-17).

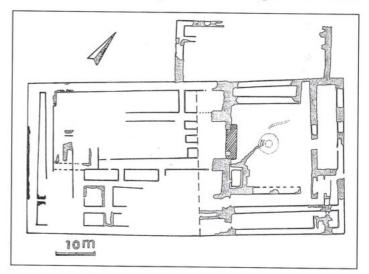
Brief mention should be made of the cultic site of Horvat Qitmit, about 10 km south of Arad in an-Nagab, not in Edom proper. The excavator identified this as an Edomite shrine on the basis of more than 500 figurines and "cult" vessels (Beit-Arieh 1991). The site comprised two complexes, each with a number of rooms, a courtyard and various installations. Most of the "cultic" finds were from Complex A. There was a mixture of Palestinian Iron Age pottery and "Edomite" pottery - although all of the latter was locally made. One ostracon bears the name "Qos", the Edomite god, and the name is also found in an inscription on the rim fragment of a krater. While this may be evidence for an Edomite shrine, and of the movement of the Edomites west across Wādī 'Arabah, it is not beyond dispute. Just because we call pottery "Edomite", it does not mean that wherever we find it, it is Edomite. There is nothing to indicate that this pottery was of necessity confined to any ethnic group, rather than being the standard Iron II painted pottery of an area extending beyond Edom proper. To avoid confusion, we should not give this pottery an ethnic title such as "Edomite", but call it "Buşayra painted ware", after the site where it was first identified or where it is most common, following the practice elsewhere in the Near East, e.g. with "Jemdat Nasr pottery" (Bienkowski 1992: 7). The presence of the name "Qos" is not by itself compelling evidence: the name is found in Edom, an-Naqab and later in al-Hijāz (Bartlett 1989: 200-207), evidence for its use is still fairly sparse and uncertain, and we cannot automatically conclude that its use indisputably indicates an Edomite, nor that its mere presence at a shrine makes the shrine itself "Edomite". The same argument holds for the "Edomite" script: its usage may be geographical rather than ethnic, and it cannot automatically be used as an argument for the presence of Edomites.

The major buildings at Busayra remain quite unique

in Edom. Excavations revealed what might be an administrative centre dominated by two or three large buildings and fortified by a town wall (Bennett 1983; Bienkowski 1990: 101-103). There is evidence for a division of the city into Upper and Lower Towns. The Upper Town consisted of the "Acropolis" (Area A) with buildings that have been described as palaces or temples, built on a deep fill or mound (FIGS. 5-6). The Lower Town consisted of what might be ordinary domestic buildings on the terraces surrounding the "Acropolis" (Areas B and D), similar to those elsewhere, for example at Ṭawilānń The Upper Town was cut off from the Lower Town by a battered enclosure wall, which has been traced between Areas B and A. Area C also probably contained a public building (FIG. 7). There appear to be several architectural phases; present evidence suggests that the buildings date from the seventh century possibly into the Persian period (Bienkowski 1990: 102-103).

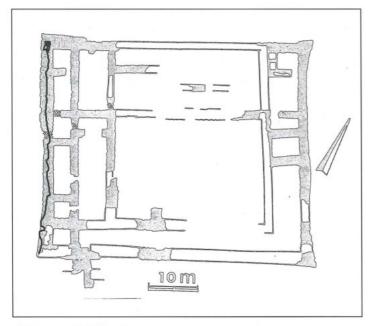
It is the buildings in Area A (the "Acropolis") which have been the subject of most comment (FIGS. 5-6). What must be stressed, even now, 20 years after they were first excavated, is that the stratigraphy of stone on stone is so enormously complex that it is extremely difficult to extract the plans of the buildings and to reach conclusions on phasing. This paper has nothing new to say about the plans or phases, only about how the buildings might be interpreted.

There appear to be two main phases, called Building B and Building A. Building B's overall dimensions were 77 x 38 m (FIG. 5). It had two entrances on the northeast side, both off centre, approached by a ramp. In the main central courtyard was a cistern into which water flowed through one or two drains, one emerging from another room. At the end of the courtyard was a flight of shallow steps flanked by plinths, possibly forming the bases of two columns. These steps led into a long narrow room.



5. Buşayra, Building B.

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6. Buşayra, Building A.

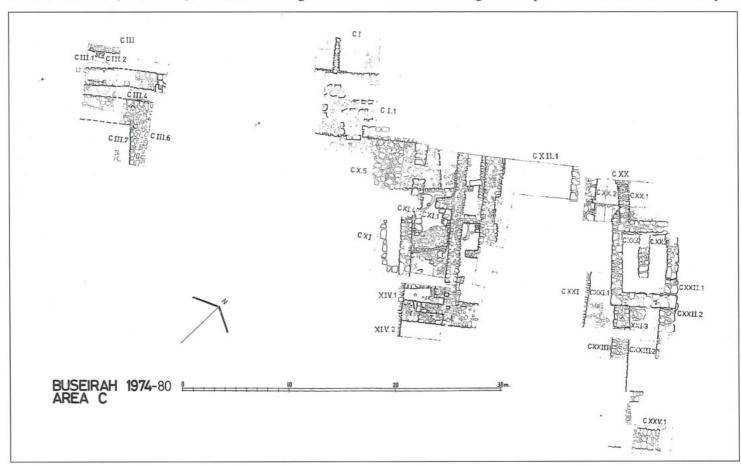
All the floors and walls were plastered. There was some evidence for a mudbrick superstructure.

Building A (FIG. 6) was built on top of Building B, and was smaller (48 x 36 m). There was a large central

space, with surrounding rooms or corridors. The corners of the walls seem to curve outward, hence its colloquial title, the "Winged Building". The main entrance was now on the opposite, southwest, side.

Crystal Bennett compared the plans of these buildings both to Assyrian "open-court" buildings and to the bit hilani of Syria (Bennett 1974: 4; 1982: 187). The building in Area C (FIG. 7) seemed similar in construction to Building B especially; since it contained a lavatory and bathroom, this was paralleled with the first appearance of these amenities at Khorsabad and Nineveh (Bennett 1982: 187). Building B's function as either a temple or a palace was proposed (Bennett 1977: 9; 1978: 169).

The present writer is prepared to accept a generic similarity with the so-called Assyrian "open-court" buildings in Palestine, as at Megiddo, Hazor and Lachish (cf. Amiran and Dunayevsky 1958; Aharoni 1975: 34-40; possibly also the building at Ayyelet ha-Shahar, east of the mound of Hazor [Reich 1975] and maybe others, cf. Kletter 1991: 45 n. 7; Kempinski and Reich 1992: 214ff.). Each of the buildings is slightly different in plan, but the essential features at Buṣayra, either in Building B or A or in both, are much the same: a more or less rectangular shape, a more or less central open



7. Buşayra, Area C

court (if we assume this space at Buṣayra was indeed open), an off-centre entrance, the presence of a drainage system, thick inner walls, and a double row of rooms. There is a broad family resemblance to Sargon's palace and residencies at Khorsabad, living quarters at Assur, houses at Tall Ḥalaf and Babylon, and the Assyrian palace at Til Barsip (Amiran and Dunayevsky 1958).

What is most striking, however, is that the layout of the buildings at Buşayra is also reminiscent of the Assyrian preference for an upper and lower city. At Khorsabad, the royal palace was on a platform, level with the city walls, together with a religious precinct including a ziggurat. Beneath, at ground level, was the fortified citadel, comprising a number of minor palace and other temple buildings. At Nineveh, the city's most important buildings were on Tall Kuyunjik — the palaces of Ashurbanipal and Sennacherib, and the temples of Ishtar and Nabu. At Nimrud, the mound formed from the remains of earlier settlements was reshaped and revetted to form a raised citadel for the main palaces and temple buildings (cf. conveniently Lloyd 1984: 193-201). The same was true of the north Syrian Assyrian provinces, e.g. Tall Halaf, Zinjirli or Til Barsip, although many of these had a pre-Assyrian Iron Age origin (cf. Mazzoni in press). The palace was always on a citadel, but almost nothing is known of the lower cities (cf. conveniently Frankfort 1969: 169-174). In Assyria itself, the lower city seemed also to have public buildings or residencies of officials, and we do not know where the ordinary people lived. At Buşayra, what we seem to have is an artificial mound specially built for Building B to create a "citadel" and so a distinction between an upper and lower town. This is not unusual in the southern Levant - a related concept might be the Ophel of Solomon's Jerusalem. The Lachish "residency" too stood on an elevated platform (Aharoni 1975: 34). The Stratum III citadel at Hazor was on the western edge of the Upper City (Yadin 1972: 191-192). Both "open-court" buildings at Megiddo (1052 and 1369) stood on artificial fills surrounded by sloping buttress walls (Lamon and Shipton 1939: 70-71). The Moabite "palace" at Dhībān possibly had a similar plan, and stood on the summit of the mound, though on bedrock (Morton 1989: 244-245, FIG. 13).

This pattern strongly indicates that we should consider Busayra Buildings B and A as palaces. It is acknowledged that the Assyrian and north Syrian citadels usually comprised temples as well as palaces; but given the plans of the Busayra buildings and their relatively small size, it is hard to see how they could have a dual function. Reich (in Kempinski and Reich 1992: 219-220) implies that Building B was a temple on the basis of parallels to the entrance plan at Assyrian and provincial temples (see also Bartlett 1989: 188-190). This proposal cannot be discounted, but Building B's situation as the only

structure at Buşayra on a raised citadel, separated from the Lower Town by a wall, in conjunction with the parallels cited above, does suggest that a palace is a more likely identification. If there was a temple at Busayra, perhaps to Qos, then it is probably to be sought elsewhere. What then of the Lower Town at Buşayra? Area C certainly had a public building, following the Assyrian and north Syrian pattern. Were Areas B and D also the residencies of officials, or those of ordinary people? We do not know the answer, but there is nothing in the evidence at present to discount the possibility that Buşayra ever housed more than just the Edomite king and his court (and possibly his army?). It is possible that Busayra was essentially a "royal city", but only the central part has been excavated, the rest being hidden under the present-day village to the south. What is unexcavated may be quite different from what has been excavated.

Nevertheless, we cannot automatically conclude that the layout and building plans at Buşayra were directly influenced by Assyria. We can accept that they are something foreign to Edom, but they are another example of selective borrowing, something foreign which the kings of Edom thought it was good to imitate (as indeed the Assyrian kings imitated the columned porticos of north Syrian palaces, cf. e.g. Frankfort 1969: 80; Postgate 1992: 261). We know from records that tributary kings met Assyrian kings at certain times, and occasionally probably went to Assyria — delegations of high officials, including those from Edom, are certainly attested (Weippert 1987: 100 n. 36) - and this gave them opportunity and inspiration for active emulation. Nicholas Postgate gives a vivid description of this process: "we should not see the client rulers as cowering in their citadels waiting to be irradiated with Assyrian influence, but absorbing the scene in Nineveh, fingering the tapestries and envying the silverware" (Postgate 260). It is equally possible that any influence at Buşayra came from north Syria or Palestine, where similar architecture is known, or even southern Syria, although we simply have no evidence at present for Iron Age town plans from there. There was probably a fashion in palace plans in the late Iron Age, perhaps originally Assyrian -though conceivably even north Syrian - but now widespread and adapted to local circumstances. We should not attribute too much significance to detailed differences in plans, nor necessarily conclude that they were the result of direct Assyrian influence.

Seen as part of a process linked to the *pax assyriaca*, though, these "borrowings" acquire wider significance. Urbanisation was part of Assyrian state ideology. Assyrian methods were to settle people down and increase economic output and efficiency.

Assyrian town planning can be seen throughout the

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provinces, e.g. in the Khābūr region, where the layout of upper and lower city and the building plans are similar to Busayra, e.g. at sites such as Tall Shaykh Hamad (the Assyrian Dur Katlimmu) and elsewhere (cf. Kühne 1991; Kühne in press). Although Edom was not under direct Assyrian rule, similar processes may have been at work. Present evidence suggests that settlement in Edom greatly increased under the stability of Assyrian control and the economic opportunities this offered — and so the end result was similar to that actively encouraged by the Assyrians in their provinces. As we have seen, there is little evidence of direct Assyrian involvement in Edom. Nevertheless, the Assyrian empire was largely responsible for creating the conditions in which Edom became a state - and thus indirectly responsible for increased settlement and even for the nature of the buildings at Buşayra, although urbanisation as such never took hold. We should perhaps visualise the newly enthroned kings of Edom, treated to exotic gifts of gold and silver by the Assyrian king in their role as vassals (cf. Weippert 1987: 100), seeking to emulate their peers and literally to elevate themselves in the eyes of their subjects by building a palace of the latest fashion on an artificial citadel at Busayra. Outside the royal centre, ordinary Edomites settled in open villages and farms — and some probably did not settle at all - untouched by the pomposity and grand aspirations of their rulers.

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