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Some Theoretical Issues Concerning the Rise of the Edomite Kingdom – Searching for "Pre-Modern Identities"

Introduction

If the search for "pre-modern identities", one of the main themes of the 2001 SHAJ conference in Australia, means the exploration of how ancient communities defined and projected themselves in relation to others as well as how they interacted with other polities, the Iron Age archaeology of Edom provides an important source of data for examining these problems. What makes ancient Edom germane to the quest for "pre-modern identities" is the fact that Edom figures in a number of Iron Age textual sources from a wide range of ancient Near Eastern geographic locales including the southern Levant, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. As such, the archaeology of Edom, the archaeology of the Iron Age Levant and the ancient Near East in general must be viewed as 'Historical Archaeology' (Moreland 2001) in contrast to Prehistoric archaeology that makes up most of the temporal record in our region. The main Iron Age textual data for Edom are found in Biblical sources that have been summarize by John Bartlett (Bartlett 1992), Alan Millard has presented the main Assyrian texts for Edom (Millard 1992) and Kenneth Kitchen has reviewed the Egyptian data (Kitchen 1992). While the texts provide critical historical data that can be cross-referenced and used to build general reconstructions concerning the identity of different societies who lived and interacted in Iron Age Edom, our knowledge is fragmentary at best. The ancient texts were usually written for aristocracies and reflect 'elite histories' or records of those societies rather than synthetic overviews of the cultures for which these texts were produced. Reliance solely on these historical texts to reconstruct the dynamics of the "pre-modern identities" of the people who lived and interacted with Iron Age Edom runs the risk subordinating the material culture evidence of these people to the very meager (and often biased) textual record that has survived more than 1,500 years of time. As Sarah Tarlow (Tarlow 1999) contends, historical archaeology can "make visible the invisible people of the past — the poor, the illiterate and those who were socially, politically or geographically remote from the literate and empowered centers of elite culture." However, some Mesopotamia archaeologists, such as Nicholas Postgate (Postgate 1990), have argued that Assyriology and related ancient historical fields will only advance if "archaeologists ... devise their research and record their results with historical issues in mind." This paper suggests that while text and archaeology must be critically interwoven to obtain the most robust picture of what happened in the past, archaeology provides the most objective lens for clarifying the identity and life-ways of those people who inhabited a given region in antiquity as well as those groups who interacted with them. To rise above what Timothy Champion (Champion 1990) refers to as "the tyranny of the historical record", anthropological models of ethnicity and social interaction can provide a more objective framework for incorporating historical, archaeological and other sources of data in the search for "pre-modern identities." In what follows, some of the anthropological archaeology approaches to the historical and archaeological record are explored for ancient Edom. Many of these ideas underlie the Iron Age research design for Jabal Ḥamrat Fīdān project in southern Jordan that aims at clarifying the rise, maintenance and collapse of the Edomite kingdom in relation to the control of copper metal production.

General Theoretical Issues

Recent research concerning the evolution, maintenance and collapse of complex societies (chiefdoms, states, and empires) has emphasized the importance of linking historical data with empirical archaeological and environmental evidence. The call to reassess the role of historical data in anthropological archaeology emerged out of the Post-processual archaeology critique of Processual archaeology (Binford and Binford 1968; Clarke 1968) that went to an extreme in modeling human societies as cultural systems without a concern for the historical context and nuances of the individual cultures they studied (Hod-

der 1986; 1999). In studying cultural evolution, it has become increasingly apparent that there are multiple heterogeneous pathways that affect social change in complex societies based on relations between ideology, power relations, and competition amongst social groups (Earle 1991; Ehrenreich *et al.* 1995; Gailey 1987; Price and Feinman 1995; Stein 1998). From an archaeological perspective, perhaps the most accessible of these pathways is the identification of changing patterns of power. In the historical archaeological record this seems relatively straightforward as many of the 'players' are named in the historical text and this is especially true when control over resources and production of goods can be measured in the archaeological record. According to Michael Mann (Mann 1986) social power can be conceptualized as "the ability to pursue and attain goals through mastery of one's environment." As Gil Stein (1998: 6) points out, while power is an abstract, volatile, and fluid phenomenon, it can be analyzed by studying its sources, media, and effects. For Mann (1986: 2) there are four related sources of social power that include: political, ideological, economic and military. Here we would emphasize that all of these dimensions of power have an archaeological signature that can be measured by examining the changing dimensions and networks of production and exchange provided that "pre-modern identities" can be linked between textual records and the archaeological record.

While anthropological archaeologists often study the shifting nature of power relationships by focusing on social hierarchies frequently linked to the social evolutionary 'step-ladder' (Yoffee 1998) associated with the cultural typologies of Fried (Fried 1967) and Service (Service 1962), there is a danger in assuming dependency relationships that dictate social change from the center to the periphery. This is particularly germane to the study of the emergence of secondary states, those complex societies that make up the bulk of the pre-industrial state-level archaeological record (Brumfiel 1994; DeCourse 2001; Esse 1989; Falconer and Savage 1995; Gledhill *et al.* 1988; Greenberg 2002; Helms 1993; Holl 1985 and Wattenmaker 1998). Perhaps the major weakness in applying center-periphery models to the study of secondary state formation is the inherent assumption that developments in the powerful core polities dictate change in remote peripheries (cf. Algaze 1989; Champion 1989; Rowlands *et al.* 1987; van den Brink and Levy 2002). By focusing on the dynamics of power relationships it may be possible to cull out the internal processes where social change can stem from without discarding the effects of neighboring larger scale regional polities (Sinopoli 1994). By concentrating on power and production, the nuances of local processes of social consolidation and fragmentation can be examined in relation to states and empires.

Carol Crumley's (Crumley 1979) concept of 'heterarchy' is a useful construct for describing flexible, contingent and constantly changing relations of power. According to Crumley (Crumley 1995), "While hierarchy undoubtedly characterizes power relations in some societies, it is equally true that coalitions, federations, and other examples of shared or counterpoised power abound. The addition of the term heterarchy to the vocabulary of power relations reminds us that forms of order exist that are not exclusively hierarchical and ranked relative to one another." As Stein (Stein 1998) points out, "Heterarchical aspects of social organization may act as a counterbalance or arena for resistance to hierarchical forces in a complex society. The relationship between hierarchy and heterarchy can fluctuate over time and be variable in space as well." For Janet Levy (Levy 1995), heterarchy models are especially useful for explaining the cyclical characteristics of settlements, where developments in core cultural areas can impact on fluctuations in settlement patterns. Recently, the characteristics of social systems rooted in heterarchical traditions have become well known to the world community especially since the recent conflict in Afghanistan. Media followers have observed on a daily basis how different tribal and ethnic groups play-out the fluctuating processes of social consolidation and fragmentation to the build coalitions, federations and new social organizations characterized by fluctuations in power. The changing social dynamics are related to factors linked to tribal, social and political organizations that have a relatively long history in anthropological research embodied in Fredrik Barth's (Barth 1959) now classic ethnography of the Pashtuns of northwest Pakistan. The ethnographic and historic records show that tribes and the state never lived in isolation from each other but have always been interdependent (Khazanov 1994). According to Lois Beck's (Beck 1986) study of Iranian nomadic tribes, changes in political organization on both the tribal and confederacy levels arose in symbiotic relationship to the emergence of a centralized state.

The ability for tribal societies, especially those in the Middle East, to transform into increasingly complex societies that Ernest Gellner (Gellner 1990) calls an expanding chieftaincy or "tribal quasi-states" is rooted in principles of heterarchy. Some of the salient elements of this heterarchical process include: a) segmentary-lineage organization; b) weak leadership; c) symbiosis of pastoral and agricultural populations; d) status-differentiated holy lineages; e) external trade and pilgrimage routes; f) external ideological input, and g) geo-politics. These general processes played a critical role in shaping the social complexity of historic tribal groups in the Levant during the Iron Age and the large scale excavations at Khirbat an-Nuḥās and intensive surveys along Wādī al-Ghuwayb and Wādī al-Jāriya in Jabal Ḥamrat Fīdān research area (Levy

et al. 1999) can provide an ideal setting to test these models.

Measuring Changing Patterns of Production

One way of measuring the changing dynamics of social systems is through the lens of craft specialization. As shown by Cathy Costin (Costin 1991), the organization of production is embedded in political, social, and/or economic systems. In this study, Costin's general framework for analyzing the context, concentration, scale, and intensity of production is followed to help identify the changing relations between local communities in the study area and neighboring states and empires. Recent work on the proceeding Bronze Age metal production in the study area successfully implemented this framework (Adams 1999; 2000; 2002; Levy *et al.* 2002; Yener 2000). The planned excavations at Khirbat an-Nuḥās and the intensive field surveys to be conducted along Wādī al-Ghuwayb and Wādī al-Jāriya will focus on the study of Iron Age copper metal production, ceramics, groundstone, and other realms of material culture linked through a GIS (Geographic Information System) tailored to on-site recording of archaeological and other data (Levy *et al.* 2001b). As with all research in historical archaeology, existing textual data will be integrated with the archaeological data, however, particular attention will be paid to artifacts such as figurines that may inform on social identities and to new discoveries of epigraphic data such as scarabs, ostraca, and other textual data that can be linked to the search for "pre-modern identities" of those involved in Iron Age metal production in the research area.

Theory and the Edomite Lowland Study Area

Social interaction and production are central to understanding the role of tribes and empires in the emergence of Iron Age period historically documented secondary states or kingdoms in the southern Levant. When coupled with textual and archaeological data, it should be possible to reconstruct more dynamic models of social evolution for historical archaeology. The socio-political structure and evolutionary processes linked to the emergence of Iron Age states in Palestine is a contentious issue (Finkelstein 1995; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001; Holladay 1998; Mazar 1990). The role of metal production in Levantine Iron Age societies is also a debated topic that has mostly focused on the technological and typological aspects of production rather than the social con text in which it took place (Hauptmann 2000; Muhly 1999; Rothenberg 1990; 1998; Waldbaum 1999). In neighboring Transjordan, a region dominated by semi-arid and arid landscapes, the role of segmentary societies are increasingly being viewed as a key factor to understanding the evolution of complex societies (Bienkowski and van der Steen 2001; LaBianca and Younker 1998; Routledge 2000). These "tribal" roots and underpinnings of the Iron Age kingdoms of Jordan are just beginning to be explored with empirical data. However, recent archaeological research in Ammon, Moab and Edom has contributed to the assumption that these Iron Age states did not evolve until the ninth or eighth century BC (Rogerson 1999) or even later in the seventh century BC, as evidence at Buṣayra (Bozrah) the capital of ancient Edom (see below). These research trends are especially germane to ancient Edom — the most southern Iron Age kingdom located in Jordan and the focus of Jabal Ḥamrat Fīdān project.

Part of the reason for this assumption concerning a rather late Iron Age 'statelet formation' in Edom is that most large-scale archaeological investigations have been carried out on the Edomite plateau where specific archaeological sites, using the age-old methods of historical geography pioneered by Edward Robinson (Robinson 1867), can be linked to historical texts such as the Old Testament. Examples of the major Edomite highland (plateau) excavations include the traditional capital of this Iron Age polity-Buṣayra (Bennett 1973; 1974; 1975; 1977), Ṭawīlān (Bennett and Bienkowski 1995), and Umm al-Biyāra (Bienkowski 1990). As Stephen Hart and Ulrich Hübner point out (Hart and Hübner 1997), Buṣayra is identified as having periodically been the capital and administrative center of the Edomite state which guarded both the Kings' Highway (the major north/south route through Transjordan) and a major route west to Wādī 'Arabah and then to the Negev and southern Judah. It was also relatively close to the Edomite copper mines in Wādī Ḍānā, Wādī al-Ghuwayb, Wādī al-Jāriya and other mining localities located some 10-15km to southwest in Faynān district. Two major phases of occupation have been found in all the excavated areas at Buṣayra, with numerous re-buildings and sub-phases, however, the exact dating has not yet been determined, but both phases would appear to fall within the confines of the seventh-sixth centuries BC (Hart and Hübner 1997). It is generally assumed there is no evidence for state formation in Edom earlier than the ninth century BC (Bienkowski 1995; Hart and Hübner 1997). What needs to be stressed here is that the dating of archaeological deposits on the Edomite plateau have been done without external absolute dating methods readily available though precision dating using radiocarbon ASM methods or even traditional radiocarbon analyses. Without objective chronostratigraphic data to test historical vs. archeological data, we will continue to suffer from the 'tyranny of the historical record' in Levantine historical archaeology. In addition by focusing stratigraphic excavations on the highland plateau, archaeologists have neglected the main copper ore resource zone where the key to understanding

the development of complex Iron Age societies could equally be found. Finally, textual records, particularly from the largest contemporary center of Iron Age power, namely Assyria (Millard 1992), have colored the interpretation of the development of the Edomite state let influencing scholars to view developments in ancient Edom from the faraway center of ancient Near Eastern civilization rather than in the context of the local Edomite periphery.

The longevity of heterarchical processes can be seen all the way up to the 20th century AD, and the birth of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The Iron Age research in the Jabal Ḥamrat Fīdān will explore the decentralized and contingent processes that led to changes in social complexity in this arid desert zone of Edom. The emergence of increasingly complex societies based on tribal confederation structures and gradual state centralization should be examined, as S.C. Caton (Caton 1990) suggests as a dialectical relationship between the power of the state and the power of the tribal elites. It is suggested here that local segmentary polities evolved into more complex social systems in the context of their changing social interactions with the neighboring empires (e.g. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia) throughout the Iron Age period sequence (ca. eleventh-sixth century BC). The traditional historical interpretation of the rise of Iron Age kingdoms in Transjordan (and especially Edom) has been 'core' civilization driven (Mazar 1990; Stern 2001) assuming that the hierarchical structure of the empires dictated social evolution. Consequently, little attention has been paid to how internally generated social evolutionary change may have worked in Edom in conjunction with social interactions with the Iron Age civilizations noted above.

Metallurgy and the Formation of the Iron Age Edomite Kingdom

In southern Jordan the emergence of the first historically documented state level societies is assumed to have occurred during the Iron Age, ca. eighth-sixth century BC as evidenced by excavations of major Iron Age sites on the Edomite plateau (Bienkowski 1992; Bienkowski in press; Herr 1997). However, for reasons mentioned above, the lack of research in the copper ore rich lowlands in the Faynān district has presented archaeologists with an incomplete picture of the 'highland-lowland' Edomite system. In short our view of the Iron Age in Edom has been truncated by an emphasis on sites located in the highlands that can be easily linked to late Iron Age textual data. During the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1500-1200 BC) the Egyptian 'Execration Texts' indicate that outsiders already knew the area as Edom (Kitchen 1992). According to Bienkowski (Bienkowski 1992b), most scholars believe that Edom remained largely nomadic until perhaps the seventh century BC supporting biblical evidence (Bartlett 1992) that it was only in the eighth and seventh centuries BC, after Edom's independence in the mid-ninth century BC that biblical writers became aware of Edom as a state power. However, preliminary research in the lowland district of Faynān by the German Mining Museum team in the late 1980s and 1990s (Fritz 1996; Hauptmann 2000) and more recent work by the Jabal Ḥamrat Fīdān research project has begun to show evidence for Nomadic and Sedentary Iron Age occupation in this area as early as the 11th and 10th centuries BC (Levy Adams, and Muniz 2003; Levy Adams, and Najjar1999; Levy *et al* 2001a; Levy, Adams, and Shafiq 1999; Levy and Holl 2002).

The emergence of the Edomite state has been closely linked to the Arabian trade. Edom's geographical location at the outlet of the west Arabian 'incense route' to the Mediterranean port of Gaza has been used to support this hypothesis based on the assumption that the main trade item was incense (Ephal 1982; Finkelstein 1992). However, the search for an explanation of Edomite state origins has occurred within an archaeological vacuum clouded by reliance on biblical sources. While Bienkowski (Bienkowski 1992b) alludes to the resumption of mining activities in Faynān as contributing to improved economic circumstances in the region, the lack of hard archaeological data has precluded an examination of the role metallurgy played in this process. Recent excavations along the Wādī Fīdān by Levy and Adams (Levy, Adams, and Najjar 1999) of an Iron Age cemetery with thousands of burial monuments provide the first large archaeological sample to evaluate this problem. Amongst other questions, these data and new information from the Iron Age excavations at Khirbat an-Nuḥās (Fritz 1996; Glueck 1935; Kitchener 1884; MacDonald 1992; Musil 1907) metal production center will be used to assess: a) the role of nomadic populations in the evolution of the Edomite state; b) the structure of local vs. outside control of metallurgy throughout the Iron Age; c) trade in metal with other Iron Age polities; d) how the local social structure changed when the area came under the influence of the expanding Neo-Assyrian empire/core civilization in the eighth-seventh centuries BC (Millard 1992), e) whether neighboring small scale Iron Age polities in Canaan had any control of metal production in the Faynān district in the 11th-10th centuries BC or other periods as reflected in historical texts, and other issues.

At certain points in time, settlement in the Faynān district formed an integral part of local complex social systems, such as the Iron Age Edomite kingdom (Hauptmann 1986; Hauptmann, Weisberger, and Knauf 1985; Hauptmann Weisberger 1987; Keesmann 1984). However, the degree that core civilization hegemony played in the region during the Iron Age is open to debate. The

question also arises as to whether other small-scale Iron Age polities such as those in neighboring Canaan may have periodically controlled metal production in Faynān. To date, the role of metallurgy in the formation, maintenance and collapse of the Edomite kingdom has not been systematically investigated (Bartlett 1989; 1992; Bienkowski and van der Steen 2001; LaBianca 1999; LaBianca and Younker 1998). A preliminary geophysical survey at Khirbat an-Nuḥās was carried out by the JHF team with A. Witten (Levy, Adams, and Najjar 1999; Levy 2001). Over the past five years, the Faynān district has been the focus of renewed interest for paleoenvironmental, economic and culture historical research by several British teams (Barker *et al.* 1997; Barker 2000; Barker and Thomas 1998) as well as the joint American-Jordanian project in the Jabal Ḥamrat Fīdān which represents the 'gateway' to the Faynān district (Levy, Adams, and Najjar 1999). A framework for studying the social dimensions of ancient metal production based on the application of on-site GIS was established (Levy *et al.* 2002; 2001b). The rich potential of the Wādī al-Ghuwayb and Khirbat an-Nuḥās for answering these questions for the Iron Age are outlined below in a series of test implications.

How was Trade and Exchange of Ores and Metal Organized through Time?

There are two generic scenarios that focus on *local* vs. *foreign* control of resource extraction and metal production. These are not mutually exclusive and could change through time. The following are a few of the issues and test implications to be examined in the study area for Iron Age social interaction in the copper ore rich Faynān district:

a) Iron Age Test Implications for Foreign Dominance in the Study Area

i) There should be evidence of formal socio-economic links between the foreign polities and Khirbat an-Nuḥās and its Wādī al-Ghuwayb hinterland that indicate the integration of this resource rich area into the expanding economy of foreign states through time. This can be examined through the discovery and analysis of epigraphic data such as stamp impressions, ostraca, potter's marks, inscriptions, standardized trade items such as ingots and other artifacts.

ii) The presence of officials or representatives of empires could be recognized in the archaeological record through the presence of symbols of rank and power at Khirbat an-Nuḥās and its hinterland.

iii) There should be evidence of a well-established foreign state administrative hierarchy reflected in the social organization of settlements in the study area. One data source would be the analysis of mortuary sites and structures in the study area. For example, can foreign vs. local burial practices be identified in the survey or at Khirbat an-Nuḥās?

iv) An imposed colony could be evidenced by monumental or administrative architecture imposed on the local landscape by core civilizations. Support for this implication, if applicable, could be found in foreign state-style tombs, architecture, administrative buildings, and other built structures.

v) A formal colonial presence would be evidenced by the establishment of foreign settlements such as trading posts or administrative centers along trade routes and near resource concentrations in the study area.

vi) There should be evidence of differences in agro-pastoral production strategies between the resource concentration zone and other settlement areas of the southern Levant indicating shifting patterns of economic specialization. Identifying the shifting role of pastoral societies (Henry 1992; Khazanov 1994; Zeder 1991) in the study area through time should shed light on this implication.

vii) Local elites at Khirbat an-Nuḥās and its Wādī al-Ghuwayb hinterland should emulate core civilization ideological systems through the acquisition of prestige objects from the core.

viii) Foreign dominance of trade and exchange should be evidenced through the establishment of foreign state administrative systems in the study area. This would be evidenced through petrographic studies of pottery, seal impressions, metal and stone objects to identify patterns of exchange between regions.

ix) "Colonists" whether they be IA Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians or Persians should reside in the study area. This would be evidenced by domestic spatial patterns of consumption, discard, food preparation, and the use of living space, which differ from local patterns.

x) There should be evidence of increasing social complexity as a direct result of contact with foreign civilizations.

xi) Although not a necessary condition for foreign dominance of the resource zone, there could be evidence of military conquest or control (fortresses) in the study area.

b) Iron Age Test Implications for Local Autonomy (Stein 1999)

i) The local Khirbat an-Nuḥās/Wādī al-Ghuwayb hinterland economy should be geared toward a general subsistence base with little evidence of specialization and little trade (see archaeobotanical section below).

ii) Local elites should emulate foreign ideology but display evidence of their independence.

iii) Evidence for change in social complexity should not display rapid or "punctuated" abrupt changes in the local archaeological sequence in the study area.
iv) Exchange between foreign polities and Khirbat an-Nuḥās and its Wādī al-Ghuwayb hinterland should be of low volume. The only foreign goods should be those with high ratios of value to weight (or bulk; e.g. Stein 1999).
v) There should be symmetry in exchange relations with no evidence of foreign domination.
vi) In the periphery societies, there should be no major changes in the intensity of production in agro-pastoral or craft specialization (Levy and van den Brink 2002).

Conclusion

This paper has provided an outline of how anthropological models, ancient texts and the archaeological record can be woven together in search of Iron Age "pre-modern identities" as a means for exploring how ancient communities defined and projected themselves in relation to others as well as how they interacted with other polities within the context of core-periphery relations between small Levantine polities on the periphery of larger ancient Near Eastern Iron Age core civilizations. It is suggested that the Iron Age archaeology of Edom provides an important case study for examining these problems which are germane to historical archaeology around the world (Moreland 2001). In trying to move away from the 'tyranny of the historical record' some of the problems specific to the archaeology of Edom were highlighted, especially the need to expand research into the lowlands of Edom to complement what is already known from major highland excavations. Intensive systematic archaeological surveys coupled with broad large-scale horizontal excavations with stratigraphic depth that focus on Iron Age sites linked to the production of copper metal and associated trade items will provide the needed spatial and chronological data for monitoring the cycles of core-periphery relations related to Iron "pre-modern identities" initially identified in the ancient Near Eastern textual data.

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