

**Judah Versus Edom in the Eastern Negev**

The quantity of Edomite material discovered at seventh century BC sites in the Beer Sheva valley, located in the eastern Negev desert in southern Israel, has greatly increased over the past few decades. Significant finds have been made at Arad fortress, Horvat Uza, Horvat Qitmit, Tel Aro'er and Tel Malhata (FIG. 1)

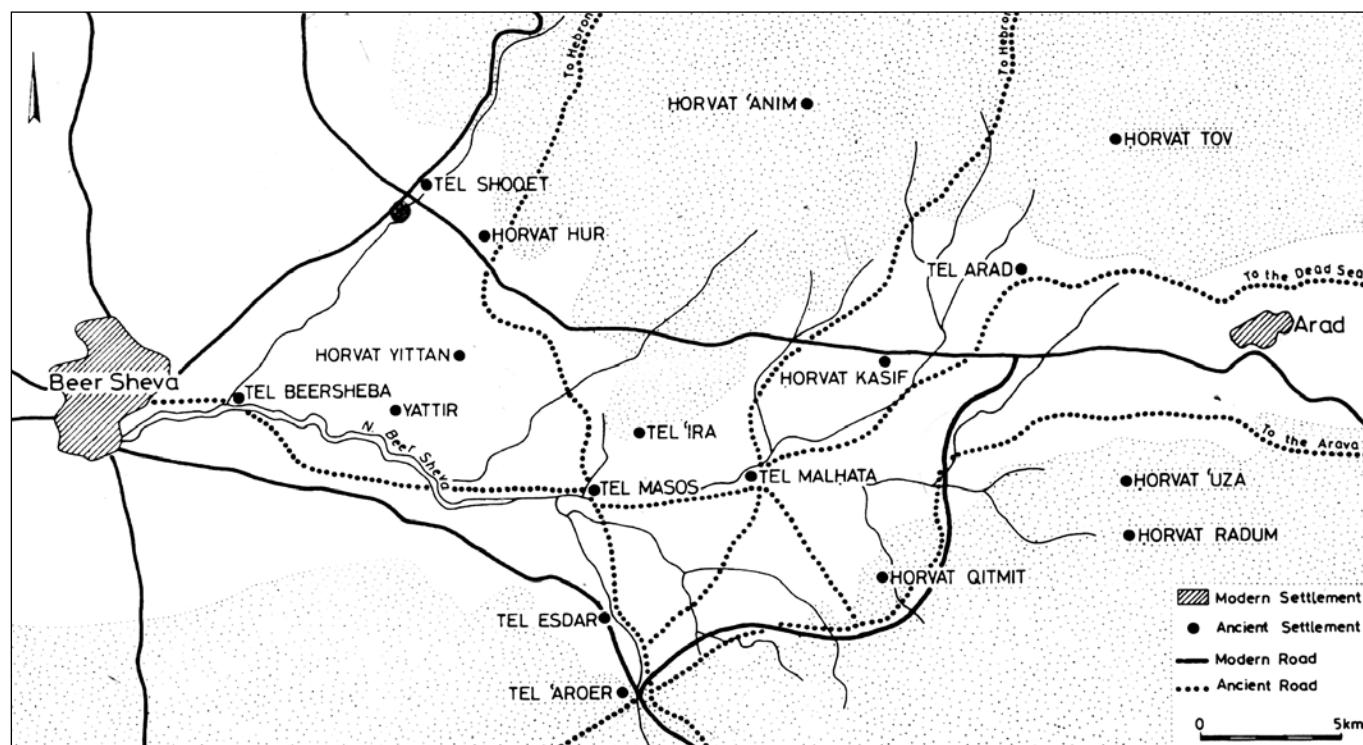
Inscription No. 24 (Aharoni 1981) the commander of the fortress is ordered to send immediate reinforcements to a settlement called Ramat Negev "lest the Edomites come". It therefore seems that this settlement, apparently located close to the eastern border of Judah, was under threat of Edomite attack.

**Arad**

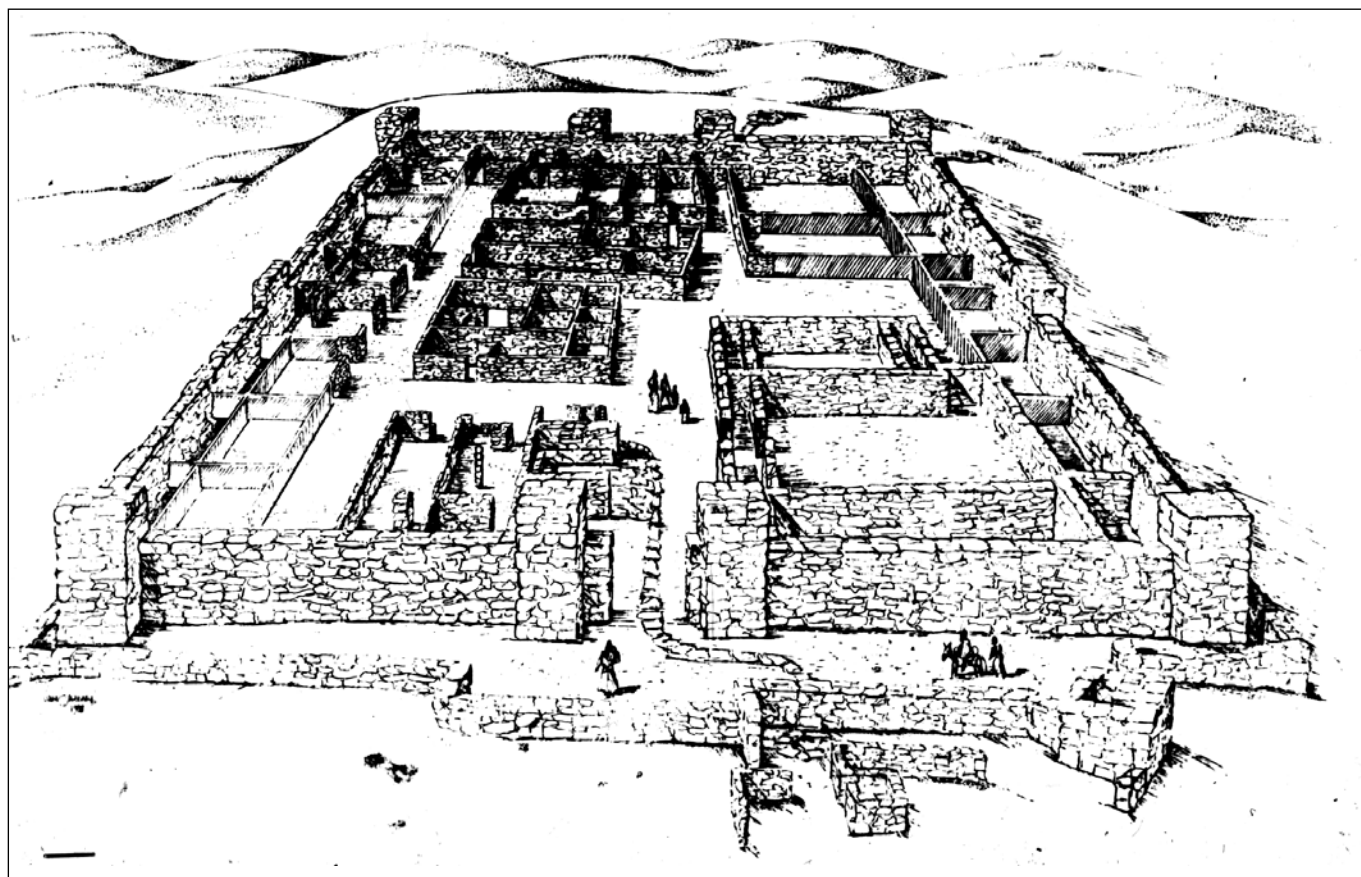
Two fragmentary Hebrew inscriptions (*ostraca*) discovered at this site in Stratum VI, which dates to the beginning of the sixth century BC, mention Edom as a political entity. In Inscription No. 40 (Aharoni 1981) we find "the letters from Edom" and "the evil that Edom has committed", while in

**Horvat Uza**

This is a towered fortress dating to the seventh century BC (Beit-Arieh 2007), located along the ancient road identified by Y. Aharoni (1958: 35) as the Biblical "Way of Edom" (FIG. 2). 35 Hebrew inscriptions (*ostraca*) were found at the site, including complete Edomite *ostrakon* (Beit-Arieh 2007:



1. Map of Beer Sheva valley and excavated sites.



2. Horvat Uza: isometric plan of the fortress.

133-137) (FIG. 3). The latter comprises a letter of command sent from an Edomite personage bearing the name of *Imlk* to an Edomite named *blbl* living in the fortress of Uza; it includes a greeting in the name of Qos, the chief god of Edom.



3. Horvat Uza: the Edomite *ostrakon*.

### Horvat Qitmit

This is an Edomite shrine dating to the late seventh or early sixth century BC, located ca. 5km. east of Tel Malhata (Beit-Arieh 1995). More than 800 artifacts were found in the shrine, mostly of which were a cultic nature alien to the culture of Judah (FIG. 4). These items include various human and animal figurines, anthropomorphic stands, stands adorned with human and animal figurines, cultic bowls, a macehead with three horns, seven fragments of inscription incised on pottery sherds — some bearing the theophoric name of Qos (see above) — and a seal with the inscription *Isbnqos* (Ieshubnaqos). Sherds of decorated Edomite vessels were also recovered, as were Edomite cooking pots, which made up most of the pots unearthed at the site. Petrographic analysis has demonstrated that although the cooking pots were produced in the region of Edom, the iconographic objects and stands were produced from local clay sources in the eastern Negev, suggesting that these artefacts were made by Edomites inhabiting that same region.



4. Horvat Qitmit: artifacts from the shrine.

### Tel Aro'er

Excavations were carried out at this site between 1975 and 1982 by the Israel Department of Antiquities and Hebrew Union College. A large quantity of Edomite pottery was found in a stratum dating to the seventh century BC, as were two Edomite inscriptions: (1) a seal bearing the name *lqosa*, the Edomite god Qos, and (2) an *ostrakon* fragment written in Edomite (Biran 1993). During an advanced stage of processing the finds from the excavation, which was recently carried out in advance of final publication, large quantities of additional Edomite pottery were also registered.

### Tel Malhata

According to excavations conducted at the site, Tel Malhata was a major city in the Judean Negev that flourished during the eighth and seventh centuries BC. During the course of the seven seasons of excavation that took place up to 2000 (Kochavi 1993; Beit-Arieh 2008), large quantities of Edomite pottery were uncovered, including vessel types known from the site of Buşayrah in Edom. The Edomite material also included *ostraca* and a ceramic figurine depicting a male figure playing a two-caned flute. The shape of the face and the production technology of the figurine are identical to those of a goddess figurine from Qitmit, suggesting they were both produced in the same workshop (Beit-Arieh 1995: 315) (FIG. 5). Excavations at this site, like those at Horvat Uza, were conducted jointly by Tel Aviv University and Baylor University.

As well as the above-mentioned sites, so rich in

Edomite finds, we should also mention two sites located nearby but outside the Judean Negev: Tall al-Khalifah and 'En Hazeva.

Tall al-Khalifah is located on the Gulf of Eilat coast and was excavated between 1938 and 1940 by N. Glueck. Stratum IV, dated to the seventh century BC, has been identified as being associated with an Edomite fortress (Pratico 1993). As well as Edomite pottery, Edomite inscriptions were also discovered here (Glueck 1971), reflecting Edomite control of the fortress during this period.

'En Hazeva, is located in the central Aravah along the Edomite border. The site was excavated by the Israel Antiquities Authority project (Cohen and Yisrael 1995) and has not yet been published in final form. The excavators have described the discovery of Edomite pottery in the final phase of the fortress, dated by them to the seventh century BC, and an Edomite seal bearing the inscription *imskt* (son of) *vhzm*, probably an Edomite personal name. Outside the fortress, near the eastern fortification wall, the remains of an Edomite temple were exposed, with a *favissa* containing small altars, anthropomorphic stands and broken cult vessels of the same type and shape as those found at Horvat Qitmit.

In light of the Edomite finds from the eastern Negev described here, a number of questions arise regarding their interpretation. Do these finds represent trade, or the quiet penetration of an Edomite population? Are they physical traces of Edomite caravans that plied a trade route crossing the Beer Sheva valley that led to ports on the Mediterranean coast, or should they be interpreted as evidence for



5. Tel Malhata: Edomite figurine of a double flute player.

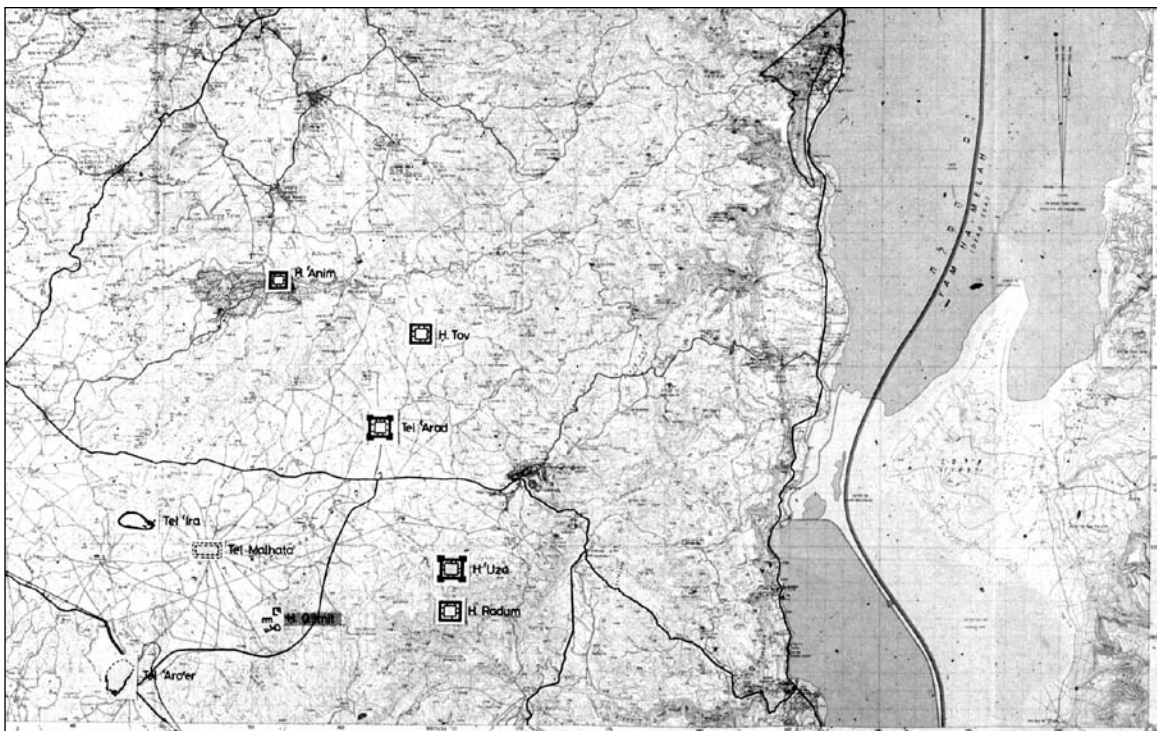
an aggressive Edomite penetration of Judah, with control of this important section of the trade route as its objective? It should be noted that all of the above possibilities have been mooted by various scholars and all, at the current stage of research, are entirely reasonable. A resolution must be based on clear historical or archeological data, or preferably both.

In my opinion, the facts seem to support the last hypothesis, that is an aggressive Edomite incursion for economic reasons. It would appear that Edom took advantage of the unstable political situation during the second half of the seventh century BC, which resulted from the weakening of Assyria, hitherto the major power in the region, and the subsequent lack of Assyrian control over the international trade route, as well as the preoccupation of Judah with the rising threat of Babylonian power. The evidence for this view is summarized below:

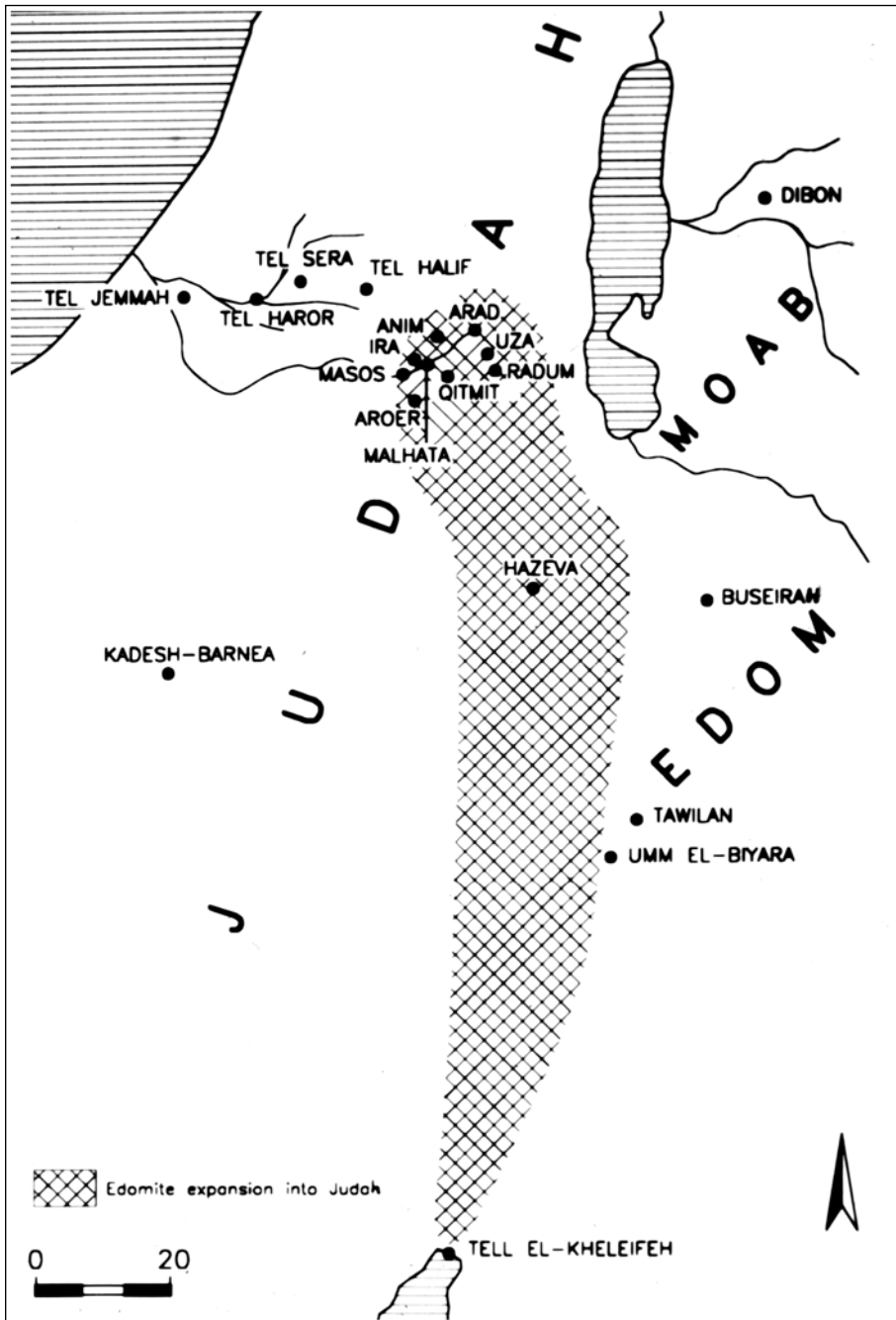
New fortresses were constructed in the region (Uza, Radum, Horvat Anim and Horvat Tov, as well as Arad which already existed), thereby creating a defensive line to the east (FIG. 6).

The existence of the Edomite temple at Horvat Qitmit, whose purpose was to fulfill the cultic needs of an Edomite population that had settled in the region.

The abundance of Edomite artifacts character-



6. Map of defensive line in the eastern Negev.



7. Map of Edomite expansion into Judah.

istic of a sedentary rather than nomadic population, including locally-produced pottery and cult items, and the presence of inscriptions indicative of a high level of culture among this population.

*Ostrakon* 24 from Arad is a historical document expressing fear of an impending Edomite attack on Judah, i.e. "lest the Edomites come".

The deep enmity expressed in the Bible towards Edom, perhaps as a result of Edomite penetration of Judean territory.

In summary, a study of the settlement distribu-

tion map of the eastern Negev at the end of the Judean Kingdom reveals a significant strengthening of defenses in comparison with previous periods, emphasizing the direct relationship between the fortifications and the abundance of Edomite finds in the area. It seems that this defensive activity was organized by Judah to protect its territory against Edomite aggression. However, owing to political events elsewhere, Edom was able to realize its ambitions and successfully invade Judean territory (FIG. 7).

## ITZHAQ BEIT-ARIEH

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