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Omride Architecture in Moab

Jahaz and Ataroth*

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Abstract

The article deals with two sites – Jahaz (*Hirbet el-Mudēyine et-Temed*) and Ataroth (*Hirbet Aṭārūs*) – both mentioned in the Mesha Inscription as having been built by the “king of Israel”. These sites feature characteristics of Omride architecture west of the Jordan, at places such as Samaria and Jezreel. The most obvious among these features are an elevated podium surrounded by a casemate wall and a moat. The article deals with the reasons for employing Omride architectural styles in Moab. It also suggests that building operations that seem to have been conducted by King Mesha were influenced by Omride architectural elements at the two Moabite sites.

1. Introduction

The Mesha Inscription refers to two strongholds that were built by the Omrides in Moab – Jahaz and Ataroth:

“[. . .] and the king of Israel built Ataroth for himself. I fought against the city and took it, and I killed all the warriors” (lines 10–11).

“Now the king of Israel had built Jahaz, and he dwelt therein while he was fighting against me. But Chemosh drove him out before me. I took from Moab two hundred men, all its divisions/heads of family, and I led them against Jahaz, and captured it to annex (it) to Dibon” (lines 18–21; translation NA³AMAN 2007).

A combination of two circumstances makes this an interesting case: 1) The identification of Ataroth is well established and that of Jahaz reasonably secure. 2) The excavation of Omride sites west of the Jordan provides intricate information about their building methods. It is therefore interesting to look at the sites of Jahaz and Ataroth and see whether they reveal characteristics of Omride architecture.

2. The Location of Jahaz and Ataroth

Jahaz is mentioned eight times in the Hebrew Bible as a place in the wilderness, not far from the Arnon, where, “Sihon gathered all his people” to fight against Israel (Num 21:13 and 23). The prophecies against Moab seem to relate to two opposite sides of its territory – Heshbon and Elealeh in the north and Jahaz in the south (Isa 15:4; Jer 48:34). Jeremiah (48:21) mentions Jahaz in the *mīyāšōr* together with Mephaath (*Hirbet Umm er-Rašāš* [*Kastron Mefa‘a*])

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2374.1010)¹ and Dibon (*Dībān* 2240.1010)². Jahaz is mentioned in the list of towns of Reuben as part of “Heshbon and all its cities which are on the plain”, together with Dibon, Bamoth-baal, Beth-baal-meon, Qedemoth and Mephaath (Josh 13:17–18, and cf. the list of the Levitical settlements in 1 Chr 6:63–64, where the same order is given – Jahzah, Qedemoth and Mephaath)³. Finally, in the Mesha inscription the Moabite king states that he annexed Jahaz to Dibon. All this means that Jahaz should be sought in the south of the *mīyšōr*, on the desert side, not far from Mephaath and Dibon (Fig. 1).

MILLER (1989, 580–587.589–590), DEARMAN (1989a, 171–174; 1997, 208) and SMELIK (1992, 74–79) did not accept the description of Israel’s detour in the desert and hence rejected the identification of Jahaz near the desert frontier. For several reasons, some scholars located Jahaz further to the west, along the “King’s Road”:

1. Num 33, as well as the Mosaic summary in Deut 2 are not aware of the Israelite detour.
2. The claim in Judg 11, regarding the detour in the desert is of a tendentious nature.
3. Num 21:10–13 is dependent on Judg 11:14–22.
4. Eusebius puts Jahaz along the road between Dibon and Lebous (Onomasticon, 104,9–11)⁴.

ABEL (1938, 354, and cf. BERNHARDT 1960, 155–158; KUSCHKE 1965, 92–93) identified Jahaz with *Hirbet Iskander* (2233.1072), on the northern bank of the *Wādī el-Wāle* (but see against this identification DEARMAN 1984, 123–124; GASS 2005, 490; WORSCHECH 2006, 86). KALLAI (1986, 440–441) suggested identifying Jahaz with *Ruḡūm el-‘Aliyā* (2327.1079)⁵, *Hirbet er-Rumēl* (2331.1097), or *es-Sālīye* (2375.0959)⁶. DE VAUX (1941, 20 [1967, 119–120]), MILLER (1989, 589–590), SMELIK (1992, 74–79) and other scholars (see in GASS 2005, 489), proposed identifying Jahaz with *Hirbet Libb* (2223.1128) north of Dibon (but see against it DEARMAN 1984, 122–123; LIPÍŃSKI 2006, 328–329; GASS 2005, 489; 2009, 44 n. 201).

¹ CLERMONT-GANNEAU 1901; 1902; GLUECK 1933–34, 4; ABEL 1938, 385; VAN ZYL 1960, 94 and KALLAI 1986, 260–261, suggested identifying biblical Mephaath with *Tell Ġāwā* (2382.1408) and the nearby site that seems to have preserved the name of Maphaath – *Hirbet Nēfa‘a* (or *Nāf‘a*) or *Qurēyāt Naḥī‘* (2403.1418); see, however, the arguments of YOUNKER 1997 and DEARMAN 1997, 210, against this suggestion. After the discovery of the 7th century Byzantine mosaics in *Umm er-Rasās* (PICCIRILLO 1986; 1987; PICCIRILLO/ATTIYAT 1986) the identification of Mephaath with this site has been accepted by many scholars (DEARMAN 1989a, 183–184; 1989b; PICCIRILLO 1990; GASS 2009, 188 and n. 962 with further literature). This identification had already been suggested by GERMER DURAND in 1897 (see THOMSEN 1907, 90; YOUNKER/DAVIAU 1993, 24). ELITZUR (1989) and KALLAI (1993) tried to support the old suggestion (and cf. to MITTMANN 1995, 14–20), but see against this attempt YOUNKER/DAVIAU (1993), who affiliate *Tell Ġāwā* with Ammon.

² GASS 2009, 222–227; 186 n. 956, with further literature.

³ These verses are not attested in the Masoretic text of Joshua, and cf. to LXX Josh 21:36–37 (MARGOLIS [*ed.*] 1992, 417–420).

⁴ On the problem with the reading of the name Dibon in the Onomasticon see DEARMAN 1989a, 183 and n. 108 with further literature.

⁵ This identification probably follows GLUECK (1939, 116–117), who suggested identifying Jahaz in *Hirbet Aleyān* (and see also VAN ZYL 1960, 80–81; LIVER 1967, 15–16). BERNHARDT (1960, 143–153), however, suggested identifying this site with Keriioth, and cf. to DEARMAN 1984, 125; GASS 2005, 491.

⁶ Against the identification of Jahaz at *Hirbet er-Rumēl* see DEARMAN 1984, 124. The site of *es-Sālīye* was proposed by ABEL 1938, 422, as the place of Keriioth (Jer 48:24), and KALLAI (*ibidem*) suggested identifying it with Bezer.

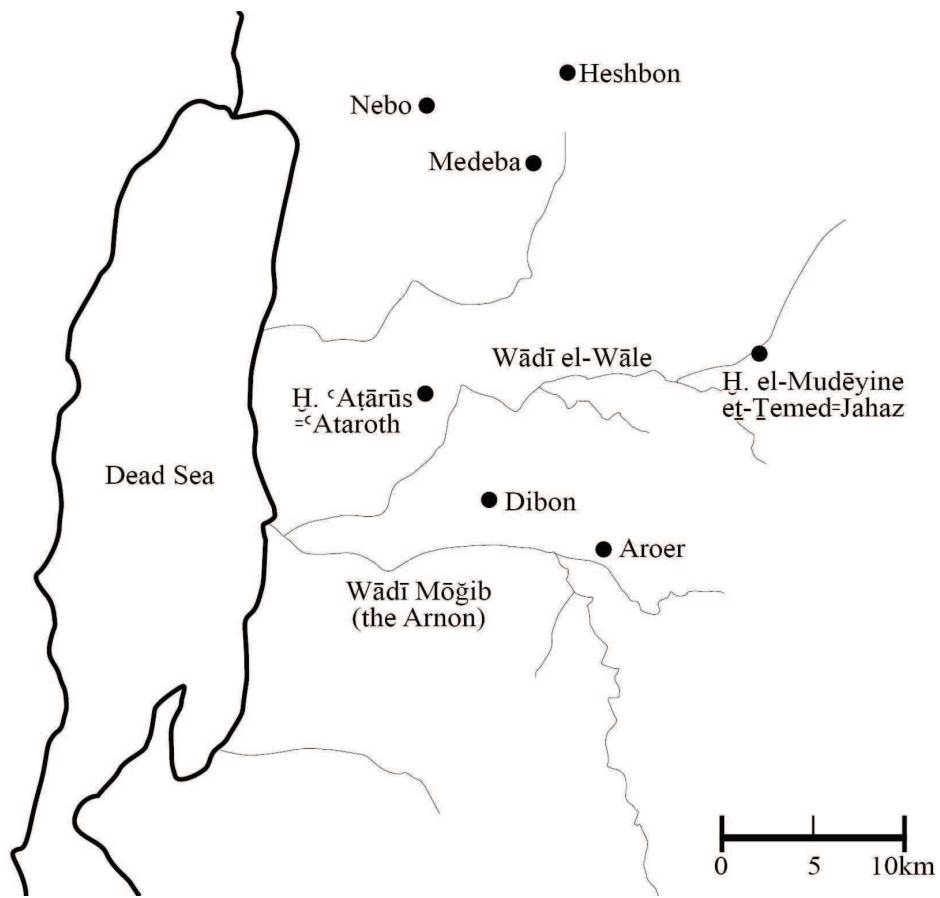


Fig. 1. Map of Moab showing sites mentioned in this article (drawing: IDO KOCH).

DEARMAN (1989a, 182–183) interpreted Eusebius’s description on the background of the north–south Roman road which passed to the east and parallel to the more frequently traveled section of the “King’s Road”⁷. DEARMAN (1984, 122–125; 1989a, 181–184; 1997, 208–209; following AHARONI 1967, 437) suggested identifying Jahaz with the fortified site of *Hirbet el-Mudēyine et-Temed* (2362.1109) located on this secondary route⁸, as it is the largest and the best fortified site in the area. This identification is now broadly accepted (RAINEY 2002, 81; LIPÍŃSKI 2006, 328–329; MOLKE 2006, 53–55; NA’AMAN 2007, 173 and n. 34).

Ataroth is mentioned twice in the Hebrew Bible, in the same chapter: in the first reference it appears before Dibon, as being located in “the land which the Lord conquered before the congregation of Israel (. . .) a land for livestock” (Num 32:4). In the second reference it is mentioned between Dibon and Aroer as one of the towns built by the sons of Gad (Num 32:34). According to the Mesha inscription “the men of Gad had dwelt in the land of Ataroth from of old”. The Moabite king claims that this region had earlier been conquered by Omri from its rightful owners (lines 10–11), and emphasizes that his own conquest restored its ancient status (KNAUF 1988, 162 n. 689; 1991, 26; NA’AMAN 1997, 87–88). The clear indication of the location of Ataroth close to Dibon and the Arnon, as well as the preservation of the name in *Hirbet ‘Atārūs* to the northwest of Dibon (2132.1094), has led to a unanimously accepted identification⁹.

Jahaz and Ataroth were, therefore, built as the southeastern and southwestern pivots of the Omride border of Moab, facing the territory of Dibon (DEARMAN 1989a, 181–182; NA’AMAN 1997, 89–92). It seems that Omri conquered northern Moab, with *Wādī el-Wāle* – the northern tributary of the Arnon and the down-slope continuation of *Wādī et-Temed* – serving as the border between the territory of the Omrides in the *mīyšōr* and the land of Dibon to their south.

3. Omride Architecture

In an article published ten years ago, one of us discussed characteristic features of Omride architecture (FINKELSTEIN 2000). The data were assembled from five sites (Samaria, Jezreel, Megiddo VA–IVB, Hazor X and Gezer VII)¹⁰, with special emphasis on three of them – Samaria, Jezreel and Hazor X. These sites show clear similarities in the following architectural concepts (details in FINKELSTEIN 2000):

⁷ Eusebius (104) writes that Iessa (Jahaz) “is pointed out between Madaba and Lebus”, probably referring to the spot where the road to Jahaz diverted from the main highway.

⁸ Based on the same logic KNAUF suggested *Hirbet er-Rumēl* as the location of Jahaz, since, in his opinion, *Hirbet el-Mudēyine* is too isolated and not sufficiently strategically located. Cf. ZWICKEL 1990, 491 n. 58; MITTMANN 1995, 13–14; SEEBASS 1999, 44; GASS 2005, 490–492; 2009, 187, and n. 959 with further literature.

⁹ TRISTRAM (1873, 270) was the first to suggest this identification, and was followed by all scholars, and cf. GLUECK 1939, 135; MURPHY 1953, 413; VAN ZYL 1960, 84; SCHOTTROFF 1966, 175–176; TIMM 1980, 24; NIEMANN 1985, 171; KALLAI 1986, 249; DEARMAN 1989a, 177–178; 1997, 208–209; LIPÍŃSKI 2006, 338–339; WORSCHICH 2006, 83. For a detailed list of literature see: GASS 2009, 255 n. 267.

¹⁰ The dating the latter three sites to the time of the Omrides follows the Low Chronology for the Iron Age strata in the Levant. For radiocarbon results supporting the Low Chronology see SHARON *et al.* 2007; FINKELSTEIN/PIASETZKY 2007; 2009; 2010 (see also in press, *contra* MAZAR/BRONK RAMSEY 2008).

- *Construction of a Podium*: Shaping an existing hill by leveling and piling fills, aimed at the construction of an elevated platform. This feature is clearly seen at Samaria and Jezreel, and to a lesser degree at the Hazor gate.
- *Casemate compound*: This trait is seen at all three sites. Their compounds measure between ca 2.5 hectares (Samaria and Hazor) and 3.8 hectares (Jezreel). At Jezreel and Hazor the casemate compounds comprised the entire site. At Samaria the casemate wall surrounded a royal acropolis.
- *Gate*: The similarity of the Hazor and Gezer gates in both plan and size was noted long ago. The Jezreel gate should be added to the list of 9th century six-chambered gates (USSISHKIN/WOODHEAD 1997, 12–23). These gates are almost identical in size.
- *Layout of the compound*: The Omride compounds were either rectangular (Samaria, Jezreel) or irregular, adapted to the shape of the hill (Hazor). They were only sparsely inhabited and included large, open areas.
- *Moat and glacis*: An elaborate rock-cut moat separated the casemate compound of Jezreel on three sides. At Hazor, a moat seems to have disconnected the casemate wall from the area of the old mound to its east. A glacis supported the Jezreel casemate wall. Not enough is known about Samaria.

In each case, these elements, or some of them, were adjusted to the special features and characteristics of the site. The latter included topography (flat area in the case of Jezreel; steep hill at Samaria; steep mound at Hazor) and function (royal quarter at Samaria and possibly Jezreel; border stronghold in the case of Hazor). These 9th century sites served as royal and administrative centers or border fortresses rather than as normal towns. They were devoted to public buildings and had large open spaces. Very little was found that attests to domestic quarters.

Two additional sites in northern Israel, possibly dating to the 9th century, feature some of the architectural characteristics mentioned above. At *ʿĒn Gēv* on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, a casemate fortress was erected on a fill. It was apparently protected by a glacis. The fort (Stratum IV in Area A, Stratum III* in Areas B–C), estimated to stretch over ca. 60 × 60m, was dated to 950–790 (B. MAZAR *et al.* 1964), or 945–886 (B. MAZAR 1993). In Low Chronology terms it means that the fort was built in the 9th century B.C.E.¹¹. At *Har ʿAdīr*, a casemate fortress protected by a strong glacis was uncovered (*Ḥadāšōt ʿArkēʾōlōgiyyōt* 59–60 [1976], 9–10). According to the excavators the three phases at the site cover a long period, from the late-11th to the 9th century B.C.E. ILAN (1999) adds that the fort was ca. 80 × 80m, and argues that its pottery is contemporary with that of Hazor X. If both fortresses date to the 9th century B.C.E., it would be tempting to suggest that they too were built by the Omrides: *Har ʿAdīr* as a center of control in the upper Galilee, facing the territory of Tyre, and *ʿĒn Gēv* as a stronghold on the border of the Aramaean territories. But additional data on the nature and exact date of the two sites is necessary before reaching firm conclusions.

Notably, provincial 9th century towns in the Northern Kingdom do not feature the characteristics of monumental Omride architecture (see, e.g., *Tell el-Fārʿa* North, [CHAMBON 1984, Stratum VIIb, Pls. II–III]; *Tell Qēmūn/Tēl Yoqnaʿām* [ZARZECKI-PELEG 2005]). Moreover, the architectural concept which includes the entire complex of features described above has not thus far been found outside the borders of the Northern Kingdom. Especially note-

¹¹ For recent excavations and date of the casemate fortress in the 9th century B.C.E. see Excavations and Surveys in Israel 117 (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.asp?id=215&mag_id=110).

worthy is the fact that it was not employed in neighboring Judah, neither in Jerusalem, the capital, nor in Lachish, the most important administrative center of the Shephelah.

4. Omride Architecture in Moab

The two sites mentioned in the Mesha Inscription as having been built by the Omrides portray many of the characteristics of Omride architecture as described above.

4.1. *Hirbet el-Mudēyine et-Temed/Jahaz*

In the early 20th century, BRÜNNOW and VON DOMASZEWSKI noticed the main features of *Hirbet el-Mudēyine et-Temed*, including its moat (see 1904, Fig. 15). MUSIL also noticed the moat (1907, 300, Fig. 137). According to GLUECK (1933–34, 13), who dated the site to the Iron Age, “about half-way down the slope is a wide ditch or dry moat, which encircles the entire mound”. GLUECK published an aerial picture (*ibidem*), in which the site looks flat and rectangular, hinting at the possibility that the top of the hill was shaped by a big podium-fill. He was so impressed with the site that he compared it to the Maiden Castle in England (1939, 119).

Excavations of *Hirbet el-Mudēyine et-Temed* by MICHELE DAVIAU commenced in 1996. Reports on the finds concentrated on its economy (DAVIAU/DION 2002a; DAVIAU/CHADWICK 2007), on a sanctuary found near the gate (DAVIAU/STEINER 2000, 10–11), on an inscribed incense altar found therein and on the ostrakon discovered at the site that read *šydn* (DAVIAU 1997, 225)¹². Little attention has thus far been given to the shape of the hill, the layout of the site and the main features of its fortification.

The fortress was built on an elongated hill located inside the valley of *Wādī et-Temed* – a northern tributary of *Wādī Mōğīb* (the Arnon)¹³. Its shape – a perfect rectangle – indicates that the natural hill had been shaped by a filling and leveling operation¹⁴. A casemate wall “boxed” the natural hill and created a rectangle that encloses an area of 140 × 80 m (including the moat; ca. 120 × 50 m for the top of the elevated podium). The fills deposited between the slopes of the natural hill and the casemate wall must have put pressure on the wall, and hence the latter required the support of an earthen glacis, which was revealed in a section cut on the southern side of the site (DAVIAU 2006a, 21). A moat was dug half way down the hill (DAVIAU/DION 2002a, 46; and see already the observation of DEARMAN 1984, 124). It surrounds the site from all sides except, possibly, the northeastern, at the approach to the gate. The outer side of the moat was lined with a stone wall, which was, in turn, supported by the continuation of the glacis. A six-chambered, 15.8 × 16.4 m gate protrudes from the rectangle on its northeastern end, protected by a 4 × 4 m tower (CHADWICK/DAVIAU/STEINER 2000, 261). A depression to the west of the gate may indicate the location of a water-system. Most structures unearthed thus far inside the compound are of a public nature, mainly a shrine near the gate and pillared houses to its south.

¹² For general descriptions see DION/DAVIAU 2000; CHADWICK/DAVIAU/STEINER 2000; DAVIAU/STEINER 2000, 10–11; DAVIAU/DION 2002b, 48–49; DAVIAU 2006b; DAVIAU *et al.* 2006. On the inscription see: RAINEY 2002; LIPÍŃSKI 2004, 139–140.

¹³ The description of *Hirbet el-Mudēyine et-Temed* is based on the publications of DAVIAU and two visits to the site, in 2005 and 2010.

¹⁴ DEARMAN (1984, 124) already described it as an “artificial mound”.

The finds retrieved from the floors of the shrine near the gate and the pillared houses date to the late Iron II, probably ca. 600 B.C.E. (DAVIAU/STEINER 2000, Figs. 12–13; DAVIAU 2006a, Figs. 4–5; DAVIAU *et al.* 2006, Fig. 14; DAVIAU/CHADWICK 2007, Figs. 2–3). They represent the end-phase in the history of the site, on the eve of the Babylonian occupation of Moab in the early 6th century B.C.E. But when was the site founded? The fact that it was built several centuries earlier is evident from radiocarbon dates of beams from the gate, which gave a 2σ result of 810–755 B.C.E. (DAVIAU 2006a, 17). This date corresponds to the late Iron IIA and the transition from the Iron IIA to the Iron IIB (FINKELSTEIN/PIASETZKY 2007; 2009; 2010)¹⁵. Iron IIA sherds present at the site (DAVIAU 2006a, 28, n. 21) indicate that it was established somewhat earlier, in the 9th century B.C.E. (DAVIAU 2006b, 566).

This isolated place did not experience destruction, apparently not even at the end of the Omride rule; Mesha makes a clear distinction between his conquests of Ataroth and of Jahaz; the latter was seemingly taken without force. In other words, buildings constructed in the 9th century continued to be in use for a long period of time, until the site was destroyed; or, structures were added in open spaces during the life-time of the site. In short, the shaping of the hill of *Hirbet el-Mudēyine et-Temed* and the construction of its fortification must have taken place in the Iron IIA, in the 9th century B.C.E.

4.2. *Hirbet 'Aṭārūs/Ataroth*

Hirbet 'Aṭārūs was visited by MUSIL, who drew the topography and surface remains, and took special notice of a rock-cut moat in the northern and southern sides of the site (1907, 395–396, and Fig. 189). GLUECK described it a “mass of shapeless ruins”, and reported on pottery from Iron I and II, as well as from the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods (1937, 26; 1939, 135). A limited excavation carried out at the site in 2000 and 2001 by Ji (2002) revealed an Iron IIA cult place that had been destroyed by fire¹⁶.

The site is located on a ridge that slopes from northeast to southwest (the upper part of the ridge will be designated hereafter as “north”). The hill commands a broad view to the east over the *māyšōr*, to the south and to the west (including a stretch of the Dead Sea). The slope is very moderate in the north and south, relatively moderate in the west and steeper in the east. A visit to the site (January 2010) revealed that in the north it seems to be covered by a post-Iron Age ruin, while in the south Iron Age remains seem to be exposed close to the surface.

The site is shaped as a flat elevated rectangle. This is best seen in an aerial picture (Taf. 13A). The size of the rectangle is ca. 155 × 90 m (measured on Google Earth), and is ca. 5 m higher than the area around it. The shape is similar to that of *Hirbet el-Mudēyine et-Temed*, but the latter seems to be somewhat smaller in size (as probably dictated by the natural hill).

¹⁵ DAVIAU did not specify the origin of the beams – wood material found in the excavation of the gate or actual remains in the walls of the gate. Even in the latter case, the beams could have been replacements of the original ones. The silos in front of the gate (the top of one of them was found under the threshold of the gate – see DAVIAU 2006a, 17; DAVIAU *et al.* 2006, 250) could have served with the gate – they must have been sealed under the plaza. Another possibility is that the excavated gate, which breaks the rectangular shape of the site, is not the original gate of the enclosure.

¹⁶ The finds have not been published. However, in the 2002 ASOR Annual Meeting the excavator of the site, CHANG-HO Ji, described this cult place as multi-chambered, with at least three parallel rooms, all of which contained cultic installations and cult objects. To the east of the main sanctuary area was a possible high place equipped with stairs and some of auxiliary cultic structures.

In the south, a well-preserved wall marks the edge of the podium. Remains of a similar wall can be seen on the western side. It is impossible to verify the nature of the wall (and whether it was supported by a glacis on the outside) without excavation. From the ground in the north and east, the edge of the podium is more difficult to notice.

As already observed by MUSIL (1907, 395–396), the most surprising and striking feature of the site is a rock-cut moat which is clearly seen on two or three of the four sides of the rectangle. In the south and west the moat is ca. 4 m wide (Taf. 13B). In one place the exposed vertical cut is ca. 3 m deep (the rest is filled with earth). MUSIL (1907, 395–396) described a rock-cut moat also in the northern side of the site (plan on p. 396). It seems that there was no moat in the east, probably because the podium ends in a relatively steep slope on this side.

5. Discussion

The resemblance of the two sites described above to Omride enclosures west of the Jordan is clear. *Hirbet el-Mudēyine et-Temed* is shaped as an elevated rectangular podium, created by a casemate wall, supported by a glacis, surrounded by an elaborate moat and equipped with a six-chambered gate (if the gate is indeed the original one). It replicates the typical features of Omride architecture, mainly at Samaria and Jezreel. The layout of *Hirbet Aṭārūs* – a rectangular podium surrounded by a rock-cut moat on three (?) sides and protected by a steep slope on the fourth – is identical to the Omride compound in Jezreel (USSISHKIN/WOODHEAD 1994; 1997; USSISHKIN 2007). The proportions of *Hirbet Aṭārūs* closely parallel the rectangular compounds of Samaria and Jezreel. Dividing their length by their width one gets a factor of 1.9 for Jezreel, 1.8 for Samaria and 1.7 for *Hirbet Aṭārūs* (the podium at *Hirbet el-Mudēyine et-Temed* is somewhat narrower, probably due to limitations imposed by the natural hill). Fifty years ago YİGAEL YADIN (*e.g.*, 1958, 86) suggested that King Solomon employed royal architects to construct the gates of Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer. His assumption was proven wrong (*e.g.*, USSISHKIN 1980; FINKELSTEIN 1996). It now seems that the Omrides practiced some sort of unified architecture on the two sides of the Jordan River.

Most features characteristic of Omride architecture were known in the Levant before the Iron II (FINKELSTEIN 2000). The casemate wall and rock-cut moat are interesting cases, because they appear in Moab in the Iron I. The earliest prototype of a casemate wall in the Levant was uncovered at middle Iron I *Tell el-Umērī* (HERR/CLARK 2009; for the date see FINKELSTEIN in press). More developed casemate walls are known in the late Iron I sites of *Hirbet el-Mudēyine el-Mu'arraḡe*, *Hirbet el-Mudēyine el-ʿAliye* and *el-Leḥūn* (OLÁVARRI 1977–78; 1983; ROUTLEDGE 2000; HOMÈS-FREDERICQ 1997 respectively)¹⁷. *Hirbet el-Mudēyine el-Mu'arraḡe* and *Hirbet el-Mudēyine el-ʿAliye* also feature a rock-cut moat (*e.g.*, ROUTLEDGE 2008, 146, 151).

The fortresses of Jahaz and Ataroth were built on the southern border of the Moabite territory that was ruled by the Omrides, facing the land of Dibon. If the fortresses of *ʿĒn Gēv* and *Har ʿAdīr* were indeed built by the Omrides, one may see a pattern of Omride podium-fortresses on the boundaries of the Northern Kingdom, facing Tyre (*Har ʿAdīr*), Damascus (Hazor and *ʿĒn Gēv*) and southern Moab (Jahaz and Ataroth).

¹⁷ The strong pastoral component in the subsistence economy of this part of Transjordan may account for the development of large sites with open courtyards surrounded by casemates – a layout that may stem from tent and encampment traditions (FINKELSTEIN 1988, 238–254).

It seems that Jahaz and Ataroth had another function – controlling the main routes that led from Edom and southern Moab to the north, routes that were probably used for the transportation of *Hirbet en-Nahās* copper to the north, along the King’s Highway. It is noteworthy that production at *Hirbet en-Nahās* – the most important copper source in the entire Levant (LEVY *et al.* 2004, 867; HAUPTMANN 2007, 127) – seems to have reached a peak in the first half of the 9th century B.C.E. (FINKELSTEIN/PIASETZKY 2008), contemporary to the rule of the Omride dynasty in the Northern Kingdom. Whether the Omrides tried to guard the flow of copper (which was essential for the military built-up in Israel and Damascus) or to monopolize it is beyond the scope of this paper.

It is reasonable to suggest that another facet of Omride construction in Moab was state propaganda. Large scale building activities aimed at shaping natural hills, such as the ones executed at *Hirbet el-Mudēyine et-Temed* and *Hirbet Atārūs*, carry with them a message of awe, power and domination (for similar needs of the Omrides west of the Jordan see WILLIAMSON 1996; FINKELSTEIN 2000). This message was probably aimed at impressing both the populations of the *mīyšōr* and the Dibon territory further to the south. It would have demonstrated the great administrative, engineering and human resources capabilities of the Omrides.

There is no way to identify the Israelite king who built Jahaz and Ataroth, but the most probable guess should be Ahab, in whose days the Northern Kingdom reached its peak military power, economic prosperity and territorial expansion. The Mesha Inscription recounts the end of Omride domination in Moab, probably as a result of the weakening of the Northern Kingdom under Damascene pressure after the accession of Hazael to power in 842 B.C.E. This means that Jahaz and Ataroth were occupied by Israel for no more than three or four decades. Still, this short rule of the Omrides in Moab may be the source of the later biblical authors’ views of the territory north of the Arnon as Israelite (Deut 2:36, 3:12, 4:48; Josh 12:2, 13:9, 16; 2 Kgs 10:33) and of their inhabitants – the Gaddaties and the Reubenites – as Israelites.

We know nothing about the post-Mesha history of Ataroth; archaeology shows that Jahaz continued to be inhabited until the demise of the Moabite state in the early 6th century B.C.E.¹⁸

6. Aroer and Dibon: Omride Elements in Mesha’s Building Endeavors?

Two construction efforts in Moab have been assigned to the days of King Mesha – the square fort at Aroer on the Arnon and the wall and great fill in the southeast sector of the mound of Dibon.

King Mesha recounts the construction of Aroer on the Arnon. OLÁVARRI’s excavations at *Hirbet Arā’ir* – the site of Aroer – revealed a relatively well-preserved massive square building measuring ca. 50 × 50 m (OLÁVARRI 1965; 1969 Pl. I). The structure constitutes three parallel stone walls with stone and earth fills between them. OLÁVARRI rightly understood it as an elevated “terrace”, with earth support on the outer side, but assumed that some of the walls inside it belonged to the actual fort (OLÁVARRI 1965, 80). The plan and section that he published (*ibidem*, Pls. I–II; 1969 Pl. I) and a visit to the site reveal that the entire structure is a foundation for a podium that was supported by a glacis. The floors of the

¹⁸ Interestingly, Ataroth is not mentioned in the town lists in Joshua and in the detailed prophecies against Moab in Isaiah and Jeremiah. Is it possible that it had lost importance in the later phases of the Iron Age, but regained some significance in the Persian period?

superstructure must have been located at the current level of the top of the mound or higher; they were completely eroded and/or robbed over the centuries. In fact, the small “mound” of *Hirbet ‘Arā’ir* is not a true tell; rather, it was created by this square, elevated podium, which was at least 10m high. Most of the Iron Age pottery in the fill seems to date to the Iron IIA (and cf. to WEIPPERT 1966, 283), lending support to the assumption that this is indeed the foundation of the fortress that had been built by King Mesha.

Iron Age construction in the southeast sector of the mound of Dibon is characterized by a great stone wall that supports a fill up to 10m deep. The fill created an imposing podium, which may be related to the building activity of King Mesha (TUSHINGHAM 1972, 5–9).

The pre-Omride phase in Moab is represented by a group of stone-built late Iron I enclosures located south of the Arnon and on its northern cliff. We refer to the sites of *Hirbet el-Mudēyine el-Mu‘arraġe* (OLÁVARRI 1977–78; 1983), *Hirbet el-Mudēyine el-‘Aliye* (ROUTLEDGE 2000), *el-Lehūn* (HOMÈS-FREDERICQ 1997) and probably the recently investigated *Hirbet el-Ma‘marīye* (NINOW 2004). These sites show no traces of fill operations and podium construction. It is therefore reasonable to argue that the prototypes for the podium constructions of King Mesha are the Omride sites in Moab.

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A. Aerial picture of *Hirbet Atarūs* looking northwest. Note the rectangular elevated podium and the moat to its south and west.



B. The Omride moat on the southern side of *Hirbet Atarūs*.

ZDPV 126 (2010) 1 – Inhalt

Das „Gadara Region Project“. Der <i>Tell Zerā'a</i> in den Jahren 2007 bis 2009. Von DIETER VIEWEGER und JUTTA HÄSER	1
Omride Architecture in Moab, Jahaz and Ataroth. By ISRAEL FINKELSTEIN and ODED LIPSCHITS	29
Ablässe und Erdbeben. Zur Datierung eines englischen Pilgerberichts (15. – 16. Jh.). Von MARTIN MULZER	43
Eine Metallschale des 18. Jahrhunderts aus dem armenischen Viertel von Jerusalem: Funktionen und Bedeutungswandel. Von MOYA TONNIES	62
Rezensionen	
<i>Morandi Bonacossi, D. (ed.)</i> , Urban and natural landscapes of an ancient Syrian capital. Settlement and Environment at Tell Mishrife/Qatna and in Central-Western Syria (Studi Archeologici su Qatna 1; Documents d'Archéologie Syrienne 12; Udine 2007). Rez. H. GENZ	75
<i>Ariotti, A.</i> , 'Qasr al-Buleida': A Late Roman-Byzantine Fortified Settlement in the Dead Sea Plain, Jordan (BAR International Series 2009; Oxford 2009). Rez. Z.T. FIEMA . . .	77
<i>Pringle, D.</i> , The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. A Corpus, III. The City of Jerusalem. (Cambridge 2007). Rez. H.E. MAYER	80
Mitteilungen	
Das Deutsche Evangelische Institut für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes, zugleich Forschungsstelle des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, im Jahr 2009. Von JUTTA HÄSER und DIETER VIEWEGER	83
Zum Wechsel der Mitherausgeberschaft von Zeitschrift und Abhandlungen	89
Abdruck einer zu Jahresbeginn erfolgten Ausschreibung von Fördermitteln für das Jahr 2010	90
Ausschreibung für das Jahr 2011	91
Bei der Redaktion eingegangene Bücher	92

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