

Arad, Qitmit—Judahite Aniconism vs. Edomite Iconic Cult?

Questioning the Evidence

CHRISTOPH UEHLINGER

Introduction

The absence of a cultic image has long been recognized as one of the most distinctive features of Jewish worship since antiquity. Writing c. 300 B.C.E., Hecataeus of Abdera provides the earliest extra-biblical comment on this conspicuous custom. According to his *Aigyptiaka*, Moses had led a colony of aliens from Egypt to Judaea, where he founded Jerusalem, established the temple, and instituted the forms of worship and ritual for the new colony:

But he had no images whatsoever of gods (*agalma theōn*) made for them, being of the opinion that (the) God is not in human form; rather the Heaven that surrounds the earth is alone divine, and rules the universe. The sacrifices that he established differ from those of other nations, as does their way of living, for as a result of their own expulsion from Egypt he introduced an unsocial and intolerant mode of life.¹

I am grateful to a number of colleagues for helping me to refine an argument that met with considerable skepticism at the Philadelphia colloquium. In spite of the qualified criticism expressed, e.g., by A. Ben-Tor and W. G. Dever, I thought it would be useful to publish a revised version of my paper mainly to stress how necessary it is for our disciplines to reflect on the often unidentified, bibliocentric assumptions that determine the interpretation of much archaeological material from Iron Age Palestine/Israel. I am grateful to Z. Zevit for sending me a then unpublished draft of his discussion of the Qitmit sanctuary, to B. Sass for the suggestion that I should start my case by laying bare some of my own presuppositions, to J. Egger for help with figs. 1 and 3, and to G. Beckman and T. Lewis for their editorial patience.

1. *Apud* Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, 40.3.4; M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism. Vol. 1: From Herodotus to Plutarch* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences

and Humanities, 1976), 26, 28. See P. Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 17, 35.

2. See C. Uehlinger, "Bilderkult," "Bilderverbot," in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, 4th ed., vol. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 1565-70, 1574-77. Tryggve N. D. Mettinger has suggested that the roots of "Israelite aniconism" should be sought in the common West Semitic custom of worshipping standing stones, which is known since Neolithic times. See his *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context*, ConBOT 42 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995). While his study has considerably advanced our understanding of massebot worship, it failed to explain the essential motives of a process that would have led from this time-honored *de facto* practice (not unrelated to iconic cults) to programmatic aniconism and even iconoclasm prohibiting idols and standing stones alike. See my review article "Israelite Aniconism in Context," *Biblica* 77 (1996): 540-49; and T. J. Lewis, "Divine Images and Aniconism in Ancient Israel," *JAOS* 118 (1998): 36-53. In response, Mettinger has considerably refined his original position. See now his "Israelite Aniconism: Developments and Origins," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. K. van der Toorn, CBET 21 (Leuven: Peeters 1997), 173-204 where he considers the rise of programmatic aniconism to be a rather late development related to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, the experience of exile, and the deuteronomistic so-called name theology. If he is right, then we should be cautious about reading too much programmatic aniconism into the cults of Iron Age Judah.

While much scholarly progress has been achieved in the twentieth century to contextualize Israelite and Judahite culture and religion within its West Semitic environment,³ the question of Israel's and/or Judah's distinctive aniconism seems to have escaped a thoroughly critical re-evaluation until recently,⁴ to the effect that many scholars still take it for granted—*nota bene* against explicit biblical, inscriptional, and growing archaeological evidence—that Israelite and Judahite worship, and particularly the worship of Yahweh, always refrained from the use of cultic images.⁵ Other scholars more cautiously limit themselves to acknowledging our present inability to identify positively and with reasonable certitude a pictorial representation of Yahweh.

3. See the survey by W. G. Dever, "'Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up?' Part II: Archaeology and the Religions of Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 298 (1995): 37-58; and now Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001).

4. But see now Lewis's article and the collection of studies edited by van der Toorn in *The Image and the Book* (n. 2 above).

5. Mettinger (*No Graven Image?*) distinguishes between the situation in northern Israel, where a Yahwistic cult focussing on bull iconography seems to be attested both by archaeological evidence and biblical texts, and Judahite Yahwism, for which he claims two forms of aniconic cult, namely, one centering on the empty cherubim throne (in Solomon's temple) and another focusing on standing stones (as in the Arad shrine).

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Program in Judaic Studies
Brown University
Box 1826
Providence, RI 02912

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Abbreviations

AA	Archäologischer Anzeiger
AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AASORDS	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research: Research Dissertation Series
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
ABL	Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collections of the British Museum
ADAJ	Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan
AfO	Archiv für Orientforschung
AHw	Akkadisches Handwörterbuch. W. von Soden. 3 vols. Wiesbaden, 1965–1981
ANEP	The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament. Edited by J. B. Pritchard. Princeton, 1954
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament. Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, 1969
AnOr	Analecta orientalia
AnSt	Anatolian Studies
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AoF	Altorientalische Forschungen
APAW	Abhandlungen der (Königl.) Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
ARM	Archives royales de Mari
AS	Assyriological Studies
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BAR	Biblical Archaeology Review
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. A Hebrew and Eng- lish Lexicon of the Old Testament. Oxford, 1907
BiOr	Bibliotheca Orientalis
BR	Bible Review
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament

I have presented elsewhere a preliminary inventory of material evidence, inscriptional sources, and historical arguments that undermine the somewhat uncritical assumption that Israelite and Judahite religion always adhered to an aniconic cult which would have distinguished Yahwistic worship from the religious practices of neighboring people.⁶ In this paper, I shall provide a related case study on the scholarly interpretation of two late Iron age sanctuaries from two neighboring and roughly contemporary sites, namely the fortress shrine from Tel 'Arad and the sanctuary situated c. 10 km south/south-west on the hilltop of Horvat Qitmit (see map on fig. 1). The former shrine is generally used as a primary witness to Judahite aniconism, while the latter (a one-period site where hundreds of fragments of cultic statuary, figurines, and stands dated to the late seventh or early sixth century B.C.E. have been recovered since 1984) is understood by most commentators as a typical example of Edomite iconic cult. The two sites are situated in the north-eastern Negev; they lie within only two hours walking distance and can quite easily be seen from each other. Being so close in space and time, but apparently so different in character, they present a real challenge for religio-historical research.

In a number of recent studies, the two sets of evidence have been treated in a thoroughly contrastive way, to the extent that what objects are found at one site are explicitly claimed to be absent at the other, and vice versa. As a consequence, Judahite and Edomite religion are increasingly construed as two mutually exclusive symbol systems. The evidence of purportedly Edomite Qitmit is considered largely irrelevant for the history of Judahite religion, unless taken as a *via negationis* illustration of what late monarchic Judahite cult and religion were *not*. In this paper, I shall question this dichotomic way of handling the evidence. I shall try to find a way out of a framework that operates with a narrow concept of 'nationally' defined religious symbol systems towards a *regional* and *social* approach that could account for the simultaneous presence and functioning of both sets of evidence within a cultural continuum and precise socio-political contexts.

Premises

Before entering the debate, I should clarify some of my theoretical premises that stand at the background of the following discussion. They concern germane issues which cannot be elaborated within the limits of this paper, although each would need thorough reflection.

6. C. Uehlinger, "Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for Yahweh's Cult Images," in *The Image and the Book*, 97-156.

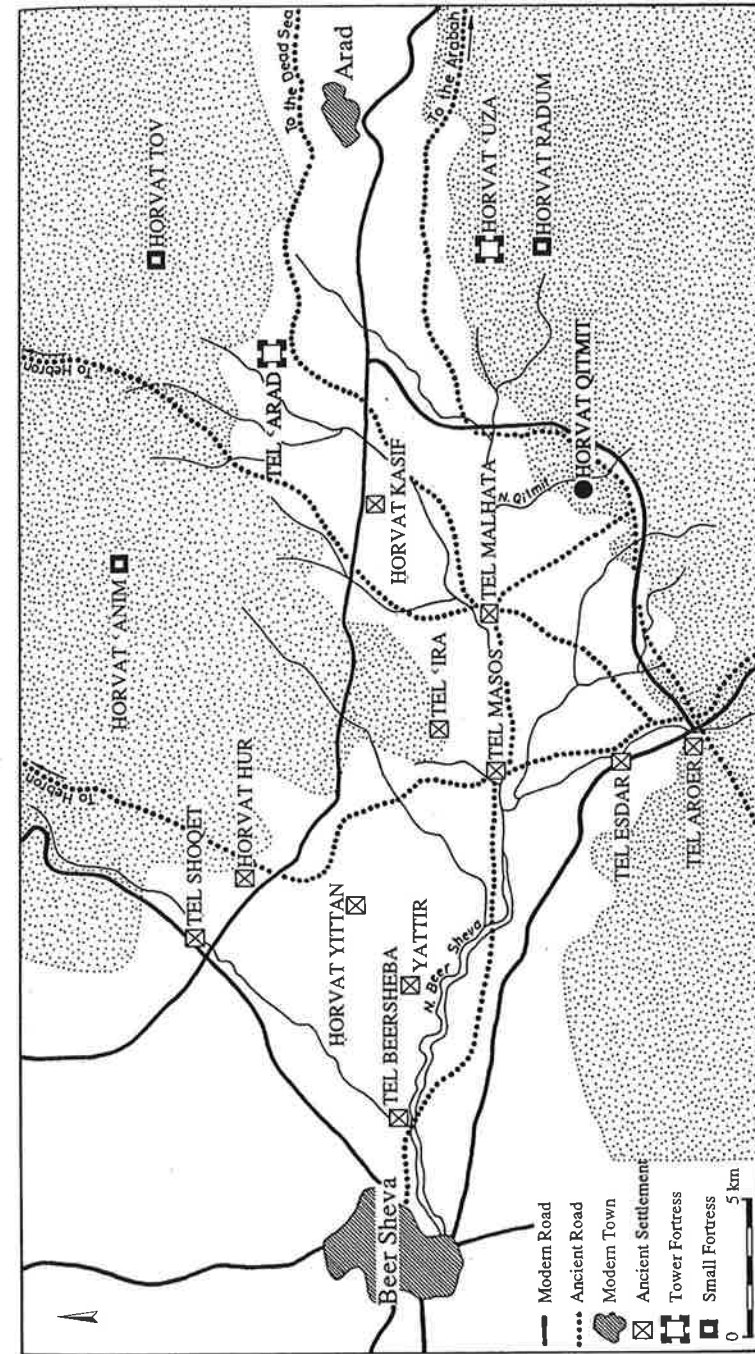


FIGURE 1: Map of the Beersheba valley showing excavated Iron age II sites (adapted from Beit-Arieh, *Horvat Qitmit* [n. 11], 5 fig. 1.5 and *id.*, *Tel 'Ira* [n. 36], 4 fig. 1.2). Courtesy Institute of Archaeology, Tel-Aviv University.

The Biblical 'Image Ban'

The so-called 'image ban' texts⁷ are often taken to reflect a *general* and *factual* aniconism of Judahite religion. In my opinion, these texts should not be read as mirrors of factual reality. Mettinger has stressed the helpful distinction between *de facto* aniconism, which is characterized by the mere absence of figurative images and may tolerate iconolatrous cults and even co-exist with them within one and the same sacred area; and *programmatically* aniconism, which repudiates and excludes the use of iconic objects in worship and may develop into outright iconoclasm. The biblical 'image ban' texts belong to the second category. They clearly represent programmatic summons excluding iconolatrous worship, whether it be addressed to YHWH or to other gods. According to C. Houtman, followed by Mettinger,⁸ the prohibition of cultic images in the decalogue (Exod. 20:4, Deut. 5:8) presupposes the aniconic nature of the cult of YHWH since the prohibition is primarily directed against other deities. However, it seems even more obvious that the prohibition presupposes the knowledge and practice of iconolatry in at least some circles of Judahite society. Why should iconolatrous practices be so emphatically rejected if they were not considered a real danger (or a viable alternative depending on one's viewpoint) to aniconism by at least some members of Judahite society? Moreover, the terminological variations in the 'image ban' texts would appear to be unnecessarily sophisticated did they not reflect real knowledge about real statuary, be it the focus of cult or votive in nature.

The 'image ban' is expressed by a whole set of distinct texts spread over all the major law codes of the Torah, almost each having its own particular wording. I agree with Mettinger and many others that none of these texts in its present form goes back to pre-exilic or even exilic times. Consequently, although the roots of the biblical 'image ban' may be earlier, *biblical* aniconism should be addressed primarily as a phenomenon of the cultic history of 'post-exilic' Yehud. The sheer number of texts and different wordings leads one to assume that the legitimacy of cultic images must have remained a subject of intense debate and reflection in Jerusalem throughout the Persian period. Of course, the possibility remains, and this is Mettinger's thesis, that Judahite Yahwism during the monarchic period was an example of *de facto* aniconism. It is possible that cults focusing on *massebot* were a prominent feature of Judahite religion during the Iron age, although the material evidence for such a statement

7. Esp. Exod. 20:3-4; 20:22-23 (. . . 23:13); 23:23-24; 34:17; Lev. 19:4; 26:1; Num. 33:52-53; Deut. 4:15-31; 5:8; 27:15.

8. C. Houtman, *Exodus vertaald en verklaard*, vol. 3 (Kampen: Kok 1996), 30-34; Mettinger, *The Image and the Book*, 176-77.

remains relatively thin.⁹ I am also ready to acknowledge the present lack of indisputable, positive evidence for a Judahite cult image of Yahweh.¹⁰ However, this lack of evidence should be put into perspective: after all, it might be due to our general ignorance of Iron age cult sites from Judah (as a matter of fact, Judahite cult sites of the Iron age can still be counted on one hand).

The 'National Religions' Framework

As mentioned above, recent religio-historical research has stressed basic analogies between South-Levantine religions to the effect that Israelite and Judahite religion and its Transjordanian counterparts, i.e. Ammonite, Moabite, and Edomite religion, have been considered as parallel sub-sets within a fundamentally homogeneous West Semitic religious environment. In such an approach, Israelite Yahweh will appear as basically another 'national deity' of the 'Hadad type,' occupying the same position and fulfilling more or less the same roles as Milkom in Ammon, Kemosh in Moab or Qaus in Edom. The model operates with two basic assumptions: on the one hand, it defines the individual profile of 'national' deities by calling him or her by different names (as if a name defined by itself individual personality); on the other, it postulates essential analogy between the religious needs and beliefs of Israelite, Ammonite, Judahite, Moabite, and Edomite worshippers. While such analogies are basically correct and may be helpful for the purpose of fundamental classification, one should not be misled by the model's inherent aesthetics. What holds the model together and at the same time provides the basic divide are the putative borderlines of 'national' states. This, however, is only one possible criterion among many others to define the sub-sets of West Semitic religions: the real picture was undoubtedly much more complex, as Dever's and Zevit's term "religions of Israel" (n. 3) aptly imply. The analysis of the archaeological, iconographic, and textual sources must be refined to include various ecological, geographical, social, and cultural parameters. To many people living in Iron age Palestine the 'national' appurtenance of the deity or deities they worshipped may have had little or no meaning at all.

The 'national religions' model considers the major gods as tutelary patrons of king and state. It is largely based on texts which belong to the

9. See E. Bloch-Smith's contribution to the present volume.

10. The terracotta group, which I discussed in relation to the syntagm "Yahweh and His Asherah" in the afore-mentioned article ("Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine" [n. 6], 149-52), will remain something of an enigma as long as no parallels are known. Still, it provides important evidence against the assumption that Judahite religion of the Iron Age was generally aniconic.

sphere of the state, the army, and public administration. While it works well for such texts as the Mesha or the Tel Dan inscriptions (although we should still distinguish between territorial, 'national' and dynastic links of specific deities), it suffices to consider the texts from Deir 'Allā to grasp at once the model's major shortcoming. The controversy whether these represent Aramaean, Israelite or Ammonite religion will probably never come to an end since the source material does not square with the grid of 'national' classification. Similarly, the appearance of two regional forms of Yahweh and his Asherah in closely related inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud points to the limits of the 'national religions' model. While "Yahweh of Samaria" should probably be identified with the tutelary god of the Israelite state, "Yahweh of Teman" almost certainly was not a state-related god. I would thus suggest that before drawing borderlines and attributing a given set of evidence to, e.g., Judahite or Edomite religion, we should ask ourselves whether the 'national religion' framework really fits the sources under scrutiny. Moreover, we should ask for the social and institutional level on which a set of evidence operated before drawing conclusions with regard to the worshippers' ethnic affiliation. In sum, when comparing Judahite and Edomite religion on the basis of the two cultic structures of Arad and Qitmit, we should take care not to mix up figs with fir-cones.

My working hypothesis follows a 'center and periphery' model and runs as follows: 'National' religion probably had a relatively strong impact in the capitals of the Iron age so-called territorial states, and in the centers of national administration as well. The more one left the center, other factors would become important in the constitution of the religious symbol-system—unless one would get to an outpost of the Judahite state administration such as the fortress of Arad, where the geographically conditioned national fade-out would be counter-balanced by the strong institutional link to the center of the state. Where such a link did not exist, as in Qitmit, one should not expect to find nationally defined 'Edomite religion' but rather ask how this particular set of evidence operated in its primary regional context.

Does Arad prove the essentially aniconic character of Judahite Yahwism, and is Qitmit indeed an 'Edomite shrine' which testifies to a distinctively Edomite iconolatry? The present paper aims at a critical re-evaluation of the evidence from both sites. We shall outline the archaeological findings and their interpretation by the excavators and other scholars, discuss the pitfalls of excessive dichotomies based on 'national' or 'ethnic' attributions, and end with some positive suggestions how to integrate both sets of evidence, however contrasting they might appear, within a functional, socio-historical, and regional approach to the religious history of Iron age Palestine.

Two Sets of Evidence in Recent Scholarly Interpretation

The limits of space and time do not allow us to dwell at length on details of the archaeological record. One important difference must however be briefly mentioned before we proceed with our discussion. Only Qitmit is documented in a reasonably detailed excavation report by Y. Beit-Arieh,¹¹ which contains a meticulous study of the statuary by the late P. Beck.¹² Both authors deserve our greatest appreciation for having produced such a fine volume within ten years. That their presentation of the evidence allows a critical revision of their conclusions is in itself a mark of scholarly quality. In contrast, the late Y. Aharoni, director of the Arad fortress excavations, could not complete a final report. It is thus much more difficult to review the Arad material for which we must still heavily rely on insufficiently documented summary statements. Fortunately, Z. Herzog has recently published a new synthesis¹³ which opens some new perspectives, but which still cannot compensate for a fully documented final report.

As different as the two sites might be, they have at least one thing in common: their discovery created a sensation and stirred up public awareness far beyond the usual level of interest. Right since its discovery, the Arad sanctuary was hailed as the first Israelite temple known through archaeological excavations, and it has remained the primary reference for dozens of textbooks and studies concerned with Israelite (and Judahite) religion. Similarly, the Qitmit sanctuary has been praised as "the first Edomite shrine discovered so far, both in Eretz-Israel and in Edom"¹⁴ and

11. *Horvat Qitmit: An Edomite Shrine in the Biblical Negev*, ed. Y. Beit-Arieh, TAMS 11 (Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 1995).

12. "Catalogue of cult objects and study of the iconography," *ibid.*, 27-208; see further eadem, "Horvat Qitmit revisited via 'En Hazeva," *TA* 23 (1996): 102-14. An abbreviated version of this masterful study has been published posthumously; see P. Beck, "The Cult Objects from Horvat Qitmit," in *Imagery and Representation. Studies in the Art and Iconography of Ancient Palestine: Collected Articles* (Tel Aviv, Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University, Occasional Publications 3; Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 2002, 171-202).

13. "The Arad Fortresses," in *Arad*, ed. R. Amiran et al. (Tel Aviv: Hakkibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House; Israel Exploration Society; Israel Antiquities Authority, 1997), 117-289 (Hebrew), 294-96 (English summary). See also idem, "Arad: Iron Age Period," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, vol. 1, ed. E. M. Meyers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 174-76, and now idem, "The Date of the Temple at Arad: Reassessment of the Stratigraphy and the Implications for the History of Religion in Judah," in A. Mazar, ed., *Studies in the Archaeology of the Iron Age in Israel and Jordan* (JSOTSup 331; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, 156-78); idem, "The Fortress Mount at Tel Arad: An Interim Report," *TA* 29 (2002): 3-109.

14. M. Dayagi-Mendels, in I. Beit-Arieh and P. Beck, *Edomite Shrine: Discoveries from Qitmit in the Negev*, Catalogue no. 277 (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1987), 8; cf. *ibid.*, 20; I. Beit-Arieh, "New Light on the Edomites," *BAR* 14, no. 2 (1988): 28-41, esp. 32.

for some has quickly become the standard reference for visualizing the nature of Edomite cult. For both sites, scholarly rhetoric has generally stressed *uniqueness* as much as *typicality* for their respective 'national' or 'ethnic' religious symbol system, two notions which to a more distant onlooker would clearly appear to be contradictory.

Arad: Problems of Stratigraphy and Chronology

The excavations of the Iron Age fortress of Tel 'Arad were directed by Y. Aharoni from 1962-1965 and again in 1967. The sanctuary situated in the northwestern corner of the fortress (fig. 2) was discovered during the second season in 1963. The main features of this structure are so well-known that they may be recalled here in a cursory manner (although the details change with almost every published plan of any stratum; fig. 3): an east-west orientation, an entrance from the east into a large courtyard flanked by annex rooms, a large sacrificial altar, a broadroom main hall with benches probably used for votive deposits, and three steps leading

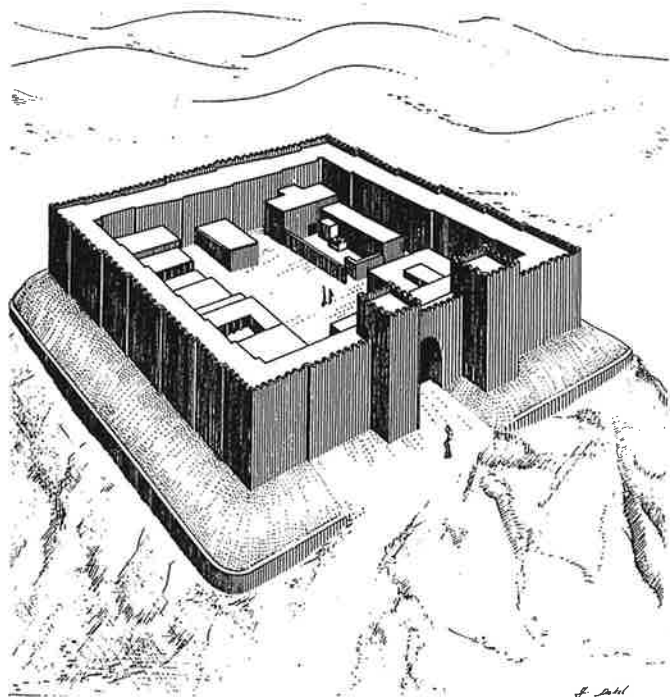


FIGURE 2: Isometric reconstruction of Arad "Str. X" fortress and shrine (Herzog, "The Arad Fortresses" [n. 13], 167 fig. 29). Courtesy Ze'ev Herzog, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University.

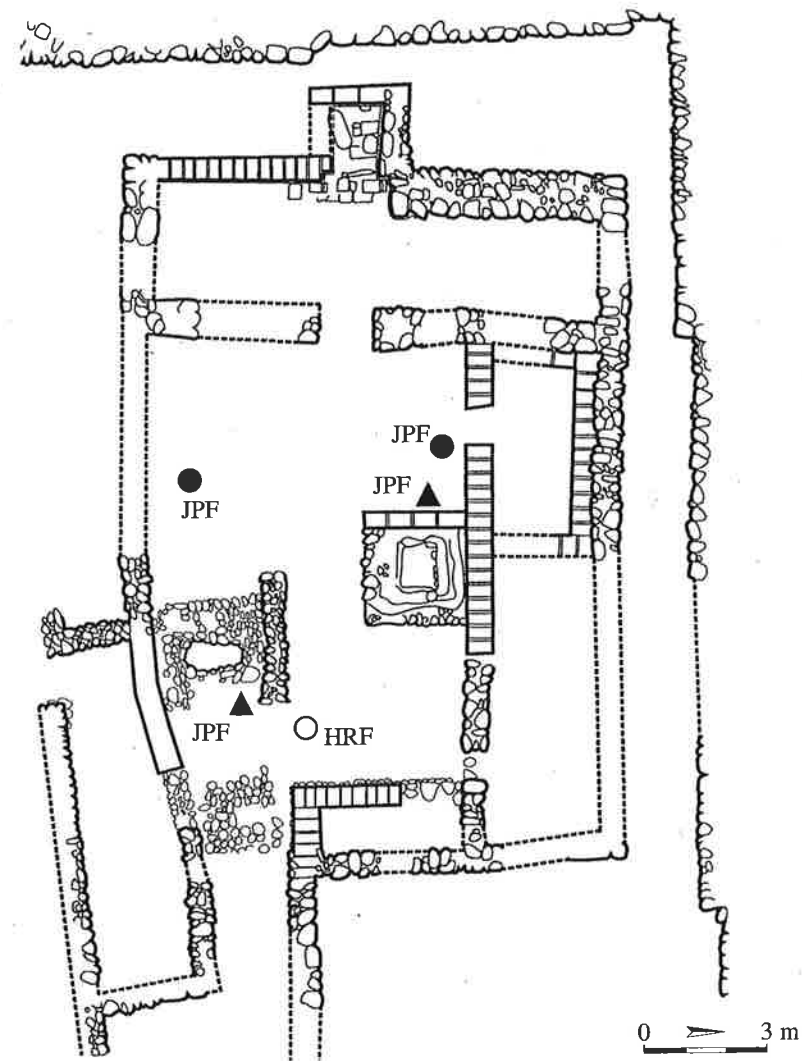


FIGURE 3: The Arad shrine ("Str. IX" plan according to Herzog, "The Arad Fortresses" [n. 13], 201 fig. 56; approximate findspots of Judean pillar figure and horse-and-rider figurine fragments supplemented from Kletter, *The Judean Pillar-Figurines* [n. 53], 108 fig. 35). Courtesy Ze'ev Herzog, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University.

up to a recessed cella. Two incense altars were found lying on their sides and covered by a thick layer of soil, an arrangement which apparently reflects intentional dismantling. A tall limestone *massebah* painted red represented the divine during the sanctuary's latest use. One or two flint slabs mentioned in passing in preliminary reports were found concealed

behind a plaster coating; they may also have stood in the cella in an earlier phase.

According to Aharoni, the sanctuary was in use from the tenth down to the seventh century B.C.E., i.e. from the establishment of the kingdom of Judah until the reign of king Josiah. For the purpose of this discussion, it must be stressed how much Aharoni's interpretation of the archaeological evidence and the site's history and chronology relied on biblical data. From a distance of more than 30 years, Aharoni's attempt to reconcile the sanctuary's plan and metrical standard with the biblical data concerning the Jerusalem temple and the tabernacle despite manifest differences looks astonishing. As its putative biblical prototype in Jerusalem, the Arad sanctuary was thought to have existed for centuries. Aharoni's Qenite cult place of the eleventh century ("Str. XII") owed as much to the Bible and biblical scholarship as the sanctuary's foundation by Solomon in the tenth century ("Str. XI"). All major alterations were related to prominent phases of Judahite cult history according to the biblical text: the first rearrangement of the main hall and adjacent rooms to the period following the division of the Israelite and Judahite monarchies, the abandonment of the sacrificial altar of "Str. X-VIII" to the so-called cultic reform of King Hezekiah, and the dismantling of the "Str. VII" temple, then overbuilt by the "Str. VI" casemate wall, to the cultic reform of Josiah. Not surprisingly, the latter two correlations have had a long career among biblical scholars and archaeologists alike.¹⁵

True, Aharoni's stratigraphical scheme and general outline of the site's history have been repeatedly challenged since the mid-1960s, with one series of scholars concentrating on issues of architecture and another on pottery typology and palaeography, but biblical scholars have not been very eager to receive these criticisms. Already in 1965, Y. Yadin questioned the dating of the "Str. VI" casemate wall to the late Iron age¹⁶ and soon got support from C. Nylander who suggested a Hellenistic dating because of the manifest use of a 14-15-teeth claw chisel.¹⁷ I. Dunayevsky had early observed the stratigraphical difficulties and considered the

15. See again A. F. Rainey, "Hezekiah's Reform and the Altars at Beersheba and Arad," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, ed. M. Coogan et al. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 333-54. But note N. Na'aman, "The Debated Historicity of Hezekiah's Reform in the Light of Historical and Archaeological Research," *ZAW* 107 (1995): 179-95; idem, "The Abandonment of Cult Places in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah as Acts of Cult Reform," *UF* 34 (2002): 585-602; C. Uehlinger, "Was There a Cult Reform under King Josiah? The Case for a Well-Grounded Minimum," in L. L. Grabbe, ed., *Good Kings and Bad Kings* (ESHM 5; Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, 393; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2005, 279-316).

16. "A Note on the Stratigraphy of Arad," *IEJ* 15 (1965): 180.

17. "A Note on the Stonecutting and Masonry of Tel Arad," *IEJ* 17 (1967): 56-59. See further E.-M. Laperrousaz, "Nouvelles remarques sur les pierres à bossages pré-hérodiennes de Palestine," *Syria* 56 (1979): 99-144.

"Str. VI casemate wall" a deep foundation for the Hellenistic casemate fortress of Str. IV, but his insights long remained unpublished before being related by Yadin.¹⁸ A. Mazar and E. Netzer showed the casemate foundations to be a secondary development of the Hellenistic tower and pointed to similar masonry from a Hellenistic tower from Aroer.¹⁹ Moreover, Mazar²⁰ and O. Zimhoni²¹ independently demonstrated that the so-called "Str. X-VIII" represent a single ceramic horizon and concluded that the putative strata represented a series of floor raisings and interior alterations within one single eighth-century stratum. Similarly, the finds of "Str. VII-VI" belong to a single late-seventh to early-sixth-century horizon. This in turn put into perspective the suggestion of F. M. Cross²² that two "Str. X" offering dishes with inscriptions (the letters QŠ scratched on the dishes before firing), which had been found near the altar, should on palaeographical grounds be dated to the later seventh rather than to the tenth or ninth century. Finally, D. Ussishkin²³ argued that the sanctuary could not have been built before but probably post-dates the water system running under the "Str. X" solid wall. In his opinion, the sanctuary was erected at a time when the water system had fallen into disuse, i.e. some time after the destruction of the eighth-century fortress of "Str. X-VIII."

Over the years and after a few attempts to save the heritage of Aharoni's basic intuitions, the members of the Arad excavation team in charge of the final publication have progressively integrated the main criticisms raised by the aforementioned scholars, without however accepting all their suggestions. The Josianic agenda for the sanctuary's final dismantling was abandoned already in 1984, but the foundation in "Str. XI" in continuity with an early Iron Age cult place (now termed "Amalekite") and the early dating of the casemate wall to "Str. VI" were then still maintained.²⁴ A series of rejoinders demonstrated internal disagreement²⁵ as much as resistance to criticism.²⁶ The situation has now changed consider-

18. Y. Yadin, "The Archaeological Sources for the Period of the Monarchy," in *The World History of the Jewish People. Vol. 5: The Age of the Monarchies—Culture and Society*, ed. A. Mazar (Jerusalem: Massada, 1979), 187-235, esp. 219-22 (Hebrew).

19. "On The Israelite Fortress at Arad," *BASOR* 263 (1986): 87-91.

20. *Ibid.*, 89.

21. "The Iron Age Pottery of Tel 'Eton and Its Relation to the Lachish, Tell Beit Mirsim and Arad Assemblages," *TA* 12 (1985): 63-90; reprinted in eadem, *Studies in the Iron Age Pottery of Israel: Typological, Archaeological and Chronological Aspects*, Tel Aviv. Occasional Publications 2 (Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 1997), esp. 203-7.

22. "Two Offering Dishes with Phoenician Inscriptions from the Sanctuary of 'ARAD," *BASOR* 235 (1979): 75-78.

23. "The Date of the Israelite Shrine at Arad," *IEJ* 38 (1988): 142-57.

24. Z. Herzog et al., "The Israelite Fortress at Arad," *BASOR* 254 (1984): 1-34.

25. M. Aharoni and A. F. Rainey, "On 'The Israelite Fortress at Arad,'" *BASOR* 258 (1985): 73-74.

26. E.g., Z. Herzog, "The Stratigraphy of Israelite Arad: A Rejoinder," *BASOR* 267 (1987): 77-79, and now idem, "The Date" (n. 13), 156-78.

ably with the publication of Herzog's reinterpretation.²⁷ Herzog now relates the sanctuary exclusively to "Str. X," which he dates to the ninth century, and to "Str. IX" of the eighth century (it would thus have overlapped at least in part with the water system), attributing the pre-destruction dismantling of the entire shrine (not just the sacrificial altar) to the reform of Hezekiah.²⁸

To sum up, the scholarly discussion of the Arad sanctuary has followed two different tracks: one, outlined essentially by Aharoni's intuitions, seduced his pupils and numerous biblical scholars fascinated by the apparently unique opportunity to glance into the history of pre-exilic Judahite worship; the other, more restricted to archaeologists, concentrated on issues of chronology. Both groups of scholars, it seems, never really questioned the idea that the Arad sanctuary provides typical and distinctive evidence for the 'aniconic' nature of the cult of Yahweh in pre-exilic Judah.

Horvat Qitmit: The Ethnicity Issue

Identified in 1979 during a survey operation, the hilltop sanctuary of Qitmit was excavated in 1984-1986 under the direction of I. Beit-Arieh. Two main building complexes approximately 15-20 m apart could be distinguished (fig. 4): Building B is an almost square structure. A large standing stone identified as a *massebah* by the excavators stands prominently in the courtyard. Four inscribed vessels with theophoric names(?) including the divine name QWS were found in this building. Complex A consisted of a tripartite building (I) and two related stone enclosures (II and III). Hundreds of fragments of cultic statuary were recovered mainly from the two enclosures and their surroundings to the south of building A-I. Further to the north-west and south-west of building A-I, two oval enclosures contained far less finds, possibly some small *massebot* among them, and apparently served a different function, perhaps as animal pens. A shallow pit (loc. 80) located some 70-80 m south-east of complex A was tentatively identified as a potential *favissa*.

Again, many of these finds are well-known and need not be commented upon here in detail. Within the limits of this paper, I would like to concentrate on the *ethnic* labeling of Qitmit as an "Edomite" shrine and its connection with particular notions of Edomite invasion and expansion into the Negev during the late Iron Age II C. The label "Edomite shrine" has been used by Beit-Arieh with continuous emphasis from an early stage of investigation through preliminary articles until

27. See above, n. 13.

28. On which see above, n. 15.

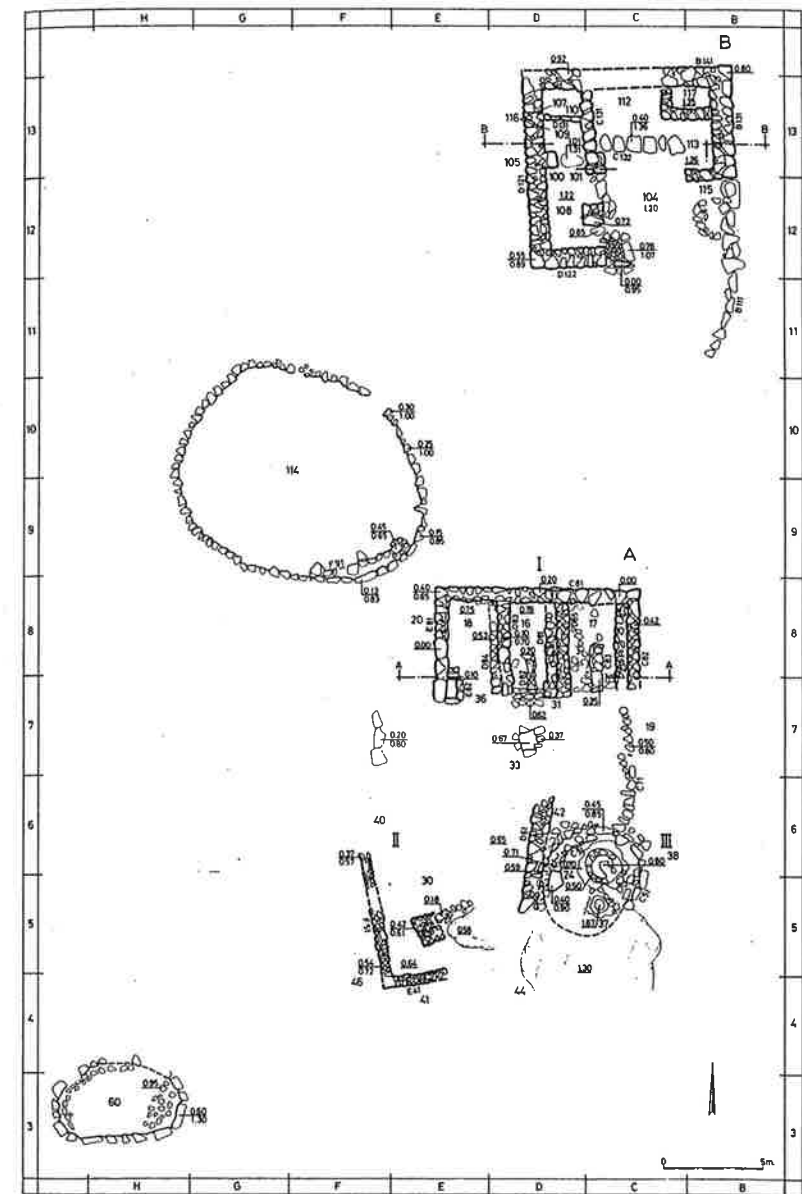


FIGURE 4: The hilltop sanctuary of Horvat Qitmit: general plan (Beit-Arieh, *Horvat Qitmit* [n. 11], 6 fig. 1.6).

the final report published in 1995. Beit-Arieh based himself upon five arguments: a considerable proportion of so-called 'Edomite pottery'; the similarity of some small figurines to comparable objects from Edom; a general resemblance of the three-room building A-I to a building of the Hellenistic period at (then Idumean) Maresha; the orientation of worship (actually the openings of the tripartite building A-I) facing south, i.e. towards the land of Edom (which actually lies in south-eastern direction); the epigraphical finds displaying Edomite script and mentioning the Edomite god Qaus.²⁹

The pertinence and validity of these criteria, any of which would deserve detailed discussion, was first questioned by I. Finkelstein.³⁰ He did not doubt the presence of Edomite features in the material remains of Qitmit but vigorously denied the site's attribution to an Edomite polity. In his opinion, the Negev was firmly under Judahite control during the later seventh century. Qitmit served extra-mural groups, such as pastoral nomads living in the area (which Finkelstein identifies as Arabs), caravaners and other wayfarers travelling along the southern trade route between Philistia, Transjordan, and Arabia. According to Finkelstein, "the special cultural *mélange* of Horvat Qitmit represents the culture of the different people who were active on the southern routes" and "indicates that it was visited by caravaners of various origins—Arabs, Phoenicians, Judahites, Edomites and others; at the same time it reflects the special cultural *koine* of the period."³¹

In a recently published overview on Edomite religion, J. A. Dearman raised a number of interesting theoretical questions on how to identify a religious term or practice as "Edomite," distinguishing between a national, cultural or territorial use of the term. In his opinion, "if the patrons of Qitmit were Edomite, the gentilic label should be understood primarily as a cultural designation. . . . Perhaps the materials represent forms of religious expression associated with several clans or population groups who traversed the area, a mixture of Edomite, Amalekite, Arab, Qedarite, and Kenite religious traditions. . . . Like Kuntillet 'Ajrud in the northern Sinai and its eclectic cult, Qitmit may have been a stopping-point that also served as a cultic way-station for several groups."³²

29. See the publications mentioned in nn. 11 and 14 above, and I. Beit-Arieh, "The Edomite Shrine at Horvat Qitmit in the Judean Negev. Preliminary Excavation Report," *TA* 18 (1991): 93-116.

30. "Horvat Qitmit and the Southern Trade in the Late Iron Age II," *ZDPV* 108 (1992): 156-70.

31. *Ibidem*, 162, 166.

32. "Edomite Religion. A Survey and an Examination of Some Recent Contributions," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite for He Is Your Brother: Edom and Seir in History and Tradition*, ed. D. V. Edelman, *Archaeology and Biblical Studies* 3 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 119-36, citation on 122-23.

Although Finkelstein republished his opinions a few years later in a monograph specifically devoted to the archaeology and history of the Negev,³³ his interpretation could not undermine the *communis opinio*. Dearman, who came to rather similar conclusions, shows no awareness of Finkelstein's article. Both authors stressed the eclectic nature of the Qitmit cult, related it to the site's location on a major southern trade route, and gave much weight to nomadic patrons and caravaners due to the site's apparent isolation. In my opinion, one main difficulty with their alternative approach lies in their supplementing one problematic ethnical, political or cultural label ("Edomite") with others, some of whose identification in the archaeological record is for the time being even more elusive. As far as I know, no one has as yet succeeded in demonstrating an Arab or Qedarite affiliation of specific items of the Qitmit repertoire, and while this does not exclude the possibility that Arab, Qedarite, and other Amalekite tribesmen participated in the Qitmit cult, it seems methodologically unwise to exchange the little known for the as yet almost unknown. Furthermore, both Finkelstein and Dearman seem to have overdrawn the parallel with Kuntillet 'Ajrud, which is an isolated caravanserai in the middle of nowhere, while Qitmit is not a way-station but a regional hilltop sanctuary situated within one or two hour's walking distance from several contemporary settlements and which can easily be seen from Arad, Tel 'Ira or Tel Malhata.

Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis undertaken on a representative sample of purportedly 'Edomite' vessels has shown that these were made of local clay.³⁴ During the 1992 excavations at Tel Malhata, two figurines were found which originate from the very same potter's workshop as the triple-horned goddess, one of the best-known finds from Qitmit. Beit-Arieh has convincingly argued that most of the pottery and statuary recovered at Qitmit was produced in this nearby settlement.³⁵ We may conclude that the sanctuary was intimately related to the contemporary settlement of Malhata, and probably also to other sites in the region such as Tel 'Ira, Tel Masos, Tel 'Aroer and Horvat 'Uza (not to speak about pastoral nomads living in the area).³⁶ That all these sites are said to have yielded a considerable percentage of so-called 'Edomite' pottery (e.g.,

33. I. Finkelstein, *Living on the Fringe: The Archaeology and History of the Negev, Sinai and Neighbouring Regions in the Bronze and Iron Ages*, Monographs on Mediterranean Archaeology 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), esp. 139-53.

34. J. Gunneweg and H. Mommsen, "Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis of Vessels and Cult Objects," in Beit-Arieh (n. 11), 280-86 with earlier references.

35. Horvat Qitmit (n. 11), 315. See further *idem*, "Excavations at Tel Malhata—Preliminary Report," *Qadmoniot* 31, no. 1 (no. 115, 1998): 30-39.

36. For a convenient list of roughly contemporary sites in the area, see now I. Beit-Arieh, *Tel 'Ira: A Stronghold in the Biblical Negev*, *TAMS* 15 (Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 1999), 5.

25% of the pottery retrieved during earlier excavations at Tel Malḥata³⁷) brings us back to the question of ethnicity: Was Qīṭmīt an Edomite shrine, and Malḥata an Edomite settlement? Did the shrine and the settlements, with the other places mentioned around, belong in any way to an Edomite polity?

Before proceeding, and to complicate the matter, we should mention in passing the recent finds from 'En Ḥaṣeva, a site located in the Arava some 45 km south-east of Qīṭmīt and at equal distance west of the Edomite capital Buṣeira. Excavations carried out in 1988-1994 under the direction of R. Cohen have produced remains of a small shrine situated outside at some distance of the small fortress of Str. 4, which is dated by the excavators to the late seventh or early sixth century. A slightly sculpted stela, three anthropomorphic pottery stands, one stand with applied birds, a human couple(?) and quadrupeds, numerous non-figurative stands, and a seal bearing an Arabic(!) name inscribed in 'Edomite' script³⁸ were among the most conspicuous finds. Mainly on the basis of comparison with Qīṭmīt (and only on second thoughts with pottery from Tell el-Ḥuleifi and sites in southern Transjordan), the structure was soon qualified as representing another "Edomite shrine" while the fortress is considered to be Judahite.³⁹ Although this process of ethnic labeling tangibly proceeds along circular arguments (Edomites have become fashionable, as long as they stay out of the fortresses⁴⁰), the finds from 'En Ḥaṣeva have strengthened the general perception of Qīṭmīt as a definitely "Edomite" shrine. In response to Finkelstein (and others?), this qualification has been supplemented by repeated comments by both Beit-Arieh and Beck on the definitely "non-Judahite" character of the site, argued specifically by comparison with Arad. This brings us to the question how we should understand the *relationship* between Arad and Qīṭmīt.

So Close, So Different: A Dichotomic Relationship?

A careful reading of early reports shows that Beit-Arieh's emphasis on the distinctly Edomite character of Qīṭmīt ("an Edomite place of worship

37. According to M. Kochavi, "Malḥata, Tel," *NEAEHL* vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, Carta Press, 1993), 934-36, citation on 936.

38. I have my doubts concerning the 'national' labeling of seal scripts; see C. Uehlinger, "Westsemitisch beschriftete Stempelsiegel: ein Corpus und neue Fragen," *Biblica* 79 (1998): 103-19.

39. See R. Cohen and Y. Yisrael, *On the Road to Edom: Discoveries from 'En Ḥaṣeva*, Catalogue no. 370 (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1995); eadem, "'En Ḥaṣeva—1990-1994," *ESI* 15 (1996): 110-16; eidem, "Smashing the Idols—Piecing together an Edomite Shrine in Judah," *BAR* 22, no. 4 (1996): 40-51, 65 (note that this typical *BAR* title alone contains three questionable assumptions); and see Beck's article mentioned above, n. 12.

40. Note I. Beit-Arieh, "Edomites Advance into Judah—Israelite Defensive Fortresses Inadequate," *BAR* 22, no. 6 (1996): 28-36.

serving an Edomite population located in Judean territory"⁴¹) presupposes considerable informal discussion and debate at the time on the relationship of Judah and Edom in the Negev during the late Iron Age. As far as I know, however, Finkelstein was first to publish an explicit statement on the relationship of the Arad and Qīṭmīt cult sites in his 1992 article, where he favored a socio-historical instead of an ethnic or political explanation for the "sharp contrast between the finds in (*sic*) the two contemporary cult sites of the region":

Arad was an "authorized" sanctuary of the Judahite administration in the south, whereas *Qīṭmīt* was a popular, isolated cult place, visited by local Arabs and by caravaneers of varied origins.⁴²

Finkelstein acknowledged discussions with P. Beck and referred to her catalogue of cult objects which was at the time largely completed but still unpublished. The subsequent statements on the relationship of Arad and Qīṭmīt made by Beit-Arieh and Beck in the final report clearly reflect internal debate at Tel Aviv and respond essentially to Finkelstein's challenge. While Beit-Arieh stressed the different architectural layout of the two shrines, Beck noted the absence of figurines from the Arad sanctuary. Her meticulous commentary on the Qīṭmīt statuary acknowledged the somewhat 'multi-cultural' references of the Qīṭmīt cult objects and their iconography and emphasized connections with Phoenicia, Philistia, and Transjordan. Yet it also stressed the non-Judahite character of these finds. In Beck's opinion,

The striking differences between the shrine at nearby Arad and that of Horvat Qitmit undoubtedly testify to independent cult practices at each site: a Judahite shrine at Arad and an 'Edomite' at Horvat Qitmit. It is very difficult to explain historically the co-existence in such proximity of these different cult centres unless they served *two different peoples*.⁴³

Beck did not want to commit herself too much with regard to the chronological issue, although it seemed possible to her that the two sites were contemporary. While she insisted on an 'ethnic' explanation for the difference between Arad and Qīṭmīt, the inverted commas she used for the term "Edomite" betrays her own doubts on the precise identification of the Qīṭmīt people. Still, she stressed more than any previous author that

41. "New Data on the Relationship between Judah and Edom toward the End of the Iron Age," in *Recent Excavations in Israel: Studies in Iron Age Archaeology*, ed. S. Gitin and W. G. Dever, AASOR 49 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 125-31, citation on 129.

42. *Horvat Qitmit* (n. 30), 161 (emphasis added).

43. "Catalogue" (n. 12), 185.

Qitmit was a non-Judahite site, which also implied that Judahites did not worship in this sanctuary. To her, Judahite worship was essentially aniconic, as demonstrated by the Arad evidence. Following an argument made fifteen years earlier by R. Dornemann (who had then commented on the apparent absence of Ammonite-type stone statuary from Judah), she was inclined to explain the Judahite peculiarity by the biblical image ban:

The striking variance [of the Qitmit statues] from the finds in the Judaean shrines of the period, e.g. Arad, where no statues have been found, perhaps reflects the prohibition of imagery (*sic*) in temples (*sic*) throughout the First Temple period. It appears that despite the claim of some scholars that the absence of Iron Age statuary should be attributed to archaeological chance, the cumulative evidence of a century of archaeological excavations bears eloquent testimony to an intentional abstention from making statues.⁴⁴

One of the latest statements on the relationship of Arad and Qitmit comes from A. Lemaire who published an informative article on Edomite history in 1997. Basing himself largely on the opinions of Beit-Arieh and Beck, this expert historian apparently has no doubts about the ethnic background of the Qitmit worshippers, who were exclusively Edomites. Thinking along the lines of Beit-Arieh's historical reconstruction (increasing Edomite pressure on the Negev and southern Judah towards the end of the seventh century), he pushed the antagonism of Arad and Qitmit even further by explicitly disconnecting the two sites chronologically. According to Lemaire, the Judahite fortress of Arad was destroyed in 597 B.C.E. probably by Edomite raiders, whereas the Qitmit sanctuary functioned between 597 and 587 B.C.E., i.e. in the aftermath of the Edomite conquest:

En effet, 1. archéologiquement, ce site n'a été occupé que durant une période assez brève, étant érigé vers la fin de l'époque royale judéenne, ou même quelques années après; 2. aussi bien les inscriptions incisées qu'un sceau et la poterie du site montrent qu'il s'agit d'un sanctuaire *typiquement édomite et non judéen*. S'il avait fonctionné en 597, il serait difficile de comprendre qu'on n'y trouve aucune influence matérielle judéenne; 3. le fait que les Édomites aient pu ériger un sanctuaire à leur *unique usage*, au centre du Négev judéen (entre Arad, Horvat 'Ouza, Tel Malhata, Tel 'Ira, Tel Masos et 'Aroër) avant 597 paraît peu vraisemblable.⁴⁵

44. *Ibid.*, 182. Against this statement which contains several overgeneralizations, see my call for caution in "Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary" (n. 6), 137-39.

45. "D'Édom à l'Idumée et à Rome," in *Des Sumériens aux Romains d'Orient: La perception géographique du monde*, ed. A. Serandour, *Antiquités Sémitiques* 2 (Paris: J. Maisonneuve, 1997), 81-103, citation on 91 (emphasis added).

While Qitmit is indeed a one-period site, Lemaire does not take into account that it may have functioned for quite some time. The excavators distinguished two building phases with minor alterations in both complexes. The abundance of finds also seems to testify to a use of the shrine during at least one generation. Furthermore, to squarely state that no Judahite influence is detectable in the material culture is wrong once we consider the utilitarian pottery alongside the cultic vessels, as we shall see below. Finally, that the Qitmit sanctuary should have been reserved by the Edomites for their exclusive use is not borne out by the archaeological evidence, which rather points to a certain 'multi-culturalism.'

According to an early-published statement of Beit-Arieh, "the existence of an Edomite shrine in the midst of an area of Judean settlements in the eastern Negev is best understood against the background of the *continuous conflict* between Judah and Edom, from the very first days of these neighboring kingdoms. This conflict is attested by the biblical account as well as by the archaeological evidence of *Edomite penetration of Judean territory*."⁴⁶ As a matter of fact, Beit-Arieh's reconstruction of the Judah-Edom antagonism is not borne out by archaeological evidence but entirely dependent upon biblical texts and related stereotypes perpetuated by later Jewish tradition.

To sum up, a number of recent authoritative statements by experts in the field of archaeology, iconography, and history converge in their putting Arad and Qitmit on a stage where they have essentially antagonistic roles to play, being called to stand for two rival polities, two different societies, two different peoples with radically different cultural background and religious outlook. The distinction of iconic vs. aniconic cult has been recognized as an emblematic feature of this essential difference. The antagonism of Judahite vs. Edomite religion is drawn out so sharply that the two sets of evidence are considered to be mutually exclusive, to such an extent as to even exclude their contemporary co-existence in the same area. It is my contention that this scenario does not adequately reflect the archaeological evidence but is largely determined by biblical premises. Ironically, the scholars responsible for this scenario go even further than the biblical texts, since they project into the realm of religion and worship what the Bible describes as a political and legal conflict. Is it not puzzling that while the Bible contains plenty of polemical texts against Philistine and Phoenician, Ammonite and Moabite gods, goddesses and cults, it apparently does not consider Edomite religion as a particular target for polemics, and certainly not as a characteristic example of paganism and/or iconolatry?

46. Beit-Arieh and Beck, *Edomite Shrine* (n. 14), 21 (emphasis added).

Questioning the Evidence

It is time now to proceed towards an alternative interpretation or at least a critical re-examination of the archaeological evidence. I should point out that my alternative approach will only occasionally refer to source material that was recovered very recently and thus would have been unknown to Beit-Arieh, Beck, or Lemaire. Most of the material evidence to which I shall refer is actually Beit-Arieh's and Beck's; my interpretation is thus largely dependent upon their presentation of the finds, although it comes to different conclusions by re-arranging the material to some extent, by putting it into a broader regional and socio-cultural context, and not least by operating with a different conceptual framework. While 'national' or 'ethnic' categories will get their due, I shall rather stress aspects of craft tradition and diffusion, the multiplicity and variety of ancient approaches to worship and ritual, and the importance of social location and function for interpreting cult-related archaeological remains. Readers will have to make up their own mind whether the alternative I shall suggest sounds acceptable to them or not, but it should at least become plain that the objects do not speak for themselves: it is the way we look at them which shapes the basic outlines of the history we tell.

Arad

On the basis of presently available evidence, it is difficult to give preference to one of the two most recent suggestions concerning the dating of the Arad shrine. From the point of view of the material basis, Herzog's latest thesis has to be taken very seriously since he is best placed to control all of the evidence. Unfortunately, however, he fails to refute effectively the two major challenges concerning the typological homogeneity of "Str. X-VIII" pottery and the palaeography of the two "Str. X" QŠ dishes (QŠ for *qodeš?* or QK for *qodeš kohanîm?*⁴⁷). From the point of view of methodology, Ussishkin's suggestions present the advantage of an exclusively archaeological discussion which clearly identifies the boundary between arguments based on evidence and hypotheses based on plausibility. I am in full agreement with his urge to provisionally disconnect the discussion of Arad from biblical premises, whether they concern the Jerusalem temple or the tabernacle, the biblical cubit or the religious reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah. I find it more difficult (however tempting) to plainly accept his very late dating of the shrine. While a "post-X" date of the shrine seems more than probable (i.e. late eighth century as

47. On these, see most recently J. Renz and W. Röllig, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik*, vol. 1 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 72-74.

terminus ante quem non), the definite link of the shrine to the "Str. VII-VI" compound (and consequently, to the later seventh and early sixth century) alone cannot (in the absence of any useable section) be firmly demonstrated, although the offering dishes and an Assyrian-type lion-weight⁴⁸ seem to favor a seventh-century date (Manasseh or Josiah?).

Whether we follow Ussishkin's or Herzog's scheme,⁴⁹ the sanctuary's history has to be drastically reduced from several centuries (Aharoni) to little more than a century (Herzog) if not to one or two lifetimes only (Ussishkin). This chronological shrinkage should make us cautious when addressing the issue of typicality. Thirty-five years after its discovery, the Arad sanctuary still presents something of a unique situation. Although a considerable number of other Judahite fortresses have been uncovered since in different areas once controlled by the Judahite state, not least in the Negev area, none has produced a similar shrine. Conversely, although cultic places from Judah may still be counted on one hand after a century of excavations, not one of them readily compares to the Arad shrine. This situation should be borne in mind and make us hesitate before we give too much weight to Arad as a typical representative of Judahite Yahwism and its cultic traditions.

That the Arad shrine is *genuinely* Judahite is not in doubt, but it is so different from other cult places found in Judah that any statement about its typicality should take into account the particular architectural, and by implication socio-political context of the building. This was first of all a shrine that functioned within a state-run garrison fortress. It was thus almost certainly concerned with tax collection, both for the state and for the state cult. Inscriptions reveal that the fortress shrine must have been closely connected to the central administration in Jerusalem. The Arad evidence may thus inform us on cultic practices on the level of 'official' state-run religion, but it has little or virtually nothing to say about Judahite popular beliefs and practices. It is only logical to assume that within a state-run fortress shrine prime importance would be given to the head of the dynastic or state cult, i.e. Yahweh, and possibly the latter's paredros (his Asherah). I confess much sympathy for the suggestion by U. Avner, A. Mazar, and others that the replacement of originally two *massebot* by a single one could reflect a cultic realignment from "Yahweh

48. On this, see Herzog et al., "Israelite Fortress" (n. 24), 16, 18 fig. 20 ("Str. IX"); idem, "The Arad Fortresses" (n. 13), 224 fig. 71:3. For interpretation, see most recently C. Zaccagnini, "The Assyrian Lion Weights from Nimrud and the 'mina of the land,'" in *Michael: Historical, Epigraphical and Biblical Studies* (FS M. Heltzer), ed. Y. Avishur and R. Deutsch (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center, 1999), 259-65.

49. It is interesting to note that Beck seems to have adhered to Ussishkin's late dating since she apparently linked the sanctuary to Str. VI; see her "Catalogue" (n. 12), 185. On the other hand, Herzog's new phasing and dating is supported by L. Singer-Avitz, "Arad: The Iron Age Pottery Assemblages," *TA* 29 (2002): 110-214.

and his Asherah" to "Yahweh alone." Such a move seems to find an echo in the transition of earlier blessing formulae "by Yahweh and his Asherah" (Kuntillet 'Ajrud, Khirbet el-Kom) to "by Yahweh" alone (Lachish, Arad).⁵⁰

Caution is in order with regard to the lack of cultic statuary in the Arad fortress shrine. All the preserved evidence points to the probable conclusion, reiterated by Herzog in his latest study, that the shrine was carefully dismantled some time before the destruction of the fortress. The last *massebah* and the two incense altars were carefully laid on their sides, while the whole sanctuary seems to have been levelled out and filled with earth. When compared, e.g., to Lachish cult place 49 which contained numerous cult-stands, Arad has produced very little finds of the kind. We may perhaps assume that the shrine was intentionally emptied and cleared before the final dismantling and concealing. If this impression is basically correct, the absence of cultic statuary, stands or figurines from the main hall and the cella would come as no surprise but produce a kind of optical illusion. Of course, there might be other reasons for the absence of Qitmit type statuary or figurines from the shrine, e.g. the latter's particular character as a fortress shrine located on Judah's southern periphery. This functional characteristic would (a) not necessarily invite locals to join in the cultic arrangements and could (b) explain why *massebot* rather than cultic images stood in the Arad cella, namely as unsophisticated representatives of the official and ultimately sole authentic cult statue of Yahweh (and his Asherah) in Jerusalem.⁵¹

Beck mentioned in passing that figurines had been found within the Arad fortress.⁵² Rarely if ever mentioned by the excavator and his followers, they have been brought to light again by R. Kletter in his study on Judean pillar figurines.⁵³ Four or five out of two dozens of figurines or fragments (one of a horse-and-rider, the others of pillar figurines) come from the area of the shrine (two were found together with a zoomorphic figurine in loc. 350, close to the sacrificial altar) and are mostly attributed to "Str. IX."⁵⁴ Although their precise stratigraphic position is difficult to

50. Cf. O. Keel, C. Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and the Image of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), § 209; Uehlinger, "Was There" (n. 15), 295-97.

51. On this, see Uehlinger, "Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary" (n. 6), 139-52. In functional terms, a stela or *massebah* is not very different from a statue as a marker of divine presence; whether a deity is present in the form of his or her cultic image or not says more about a shrine's relative status and administrative setting.

52. "Catalogue" (n. 12), 182, n. 50.

53. *The Judean Pillar-Figurines and the Archaeology of Asherah*, BAR International Series 636 (Oxford: Tempus Reparatum, 1996), 65, 96 fig. 16, 108 fig. 35, 147-48, 210-12. The presence of figurines at Arad was pointed out to me at the colloquium by E. Bloch-Smith.

54. The one exception is Kletter's no. 456, which was found out of context in a Hellenistic pit.

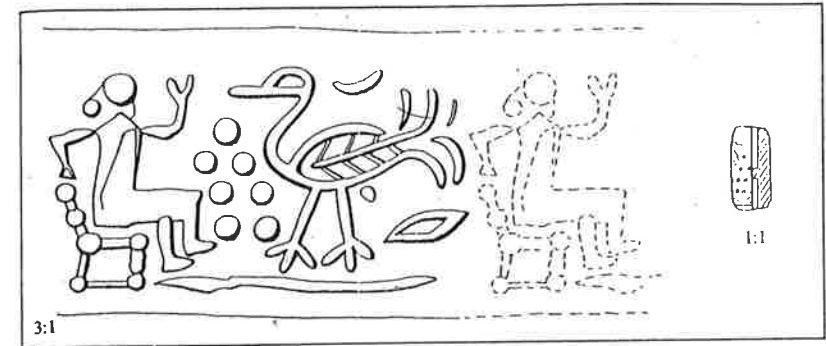


FIGURE 5: Limestone cylinder seal from Arad "Str. IX" (Aharoni, "An Iron Age Cylinder Seal" [n. 55], 53 fig. 1). Courtesy Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University.

ascertain, they would seem to belong to Herzog's "Str. IX" shrine. While the meaning and function of pillar figurines is debated, their presence at sensible places at Arad indicates that not even the Judahites of Arad were strictly aniconic in practice. Consequently, the biblical image ban is a misleading tool for interpreting the Arad shrine. Incidentally, a locally made(?) limestone cylinder seal showing a bird (apparently an ostrich) facing a seated person and three astral symbols (crescent, lozenge and *sebeti*),⁵⁵ again a "Str. IX" find, may relate rather nicely—if only in very general terms—to the Qitmit cult (fig. 5).

Horvat Qitmit

If we turn again to Qitmit, better documentation allows for a much more refined discussion. For the sake of brevity, the following remarks will concentrate on the two main structures on the site (A and B), neglecting the hypothetical *favissa* (loc. 80) and the two oval enclosures (loc. 114 and 60) for which the available evidence cannot ascertain an independent cultic setting.

The two building complexes do not appear to be mutually dependent: building B opens towards A, but A shows no functional relationship to B. The very different architectural layout and the distribution of pottery, small finds, and faunal remains confirm the impression of functional dissimilarity.⁵⁶ Complex B produced a greater percentage of the so-called

55. M. Aharoni, "An Iron Age Cylinder Seal," *IEJ* 46 (1996): 52-54; see Herzog, "The Arad Fortresses" (n. 13), 223-24 with fig. 71:1-2.

56. B could actually have been built later than A, which is clearly the main focus of the

"Edomite" pottery, especially cooking-pots, one limestone incense burner and four sherds with inscriptions incised (three before, one after firing), containing the divine name QWS, but very few if any fragments of stands or figurines.⁵⁷ The inscriptions are said to be written in Edomite script (which I would prefer to label a "script of the extreme south of Palestine"⁵⁸). There was evidence for cooking small cattle in room 116 (107 + 109). B may have been the living area of some cultic personnel in charge of the shrine's maintenance. Whether the large stone looking south, in front of which the excavators identified a small "offering surface," should be understood as a *massebah* is unclear. If it was a *massebah*, this would then be the only focus of cult in complex B, implying the worship of a single deity.⁵⁹ The latter would most probably have to be identified with Qaus, since the latter's name figures on the fragmentary inscriptions on pottery, which probably referred to the owner(s) of the vessels (one or several resident priests?), and on the bronze seal of one ŠWBNQWS from complex A. Qaus is of course mentioned in the blessing formula of the well-known ostrakon from Ḥorvat 'Uza.⁶⁰ He may have been the owner of an estate at (or the recipient of revenues from) Aroer.⁶¹ We may consider him to be a very close 'relative' (to say the least) of "Yahweh of the South" (YHWH TMN). The close kinship of the two gods is supported by biblical evidence,⁶² although it still seems "impossible to untangle the lines that intersect their identities."⁶³

Complex A is a much more differentiated ritual compound including

sanctuary. However, since the two complexes are not architecturally related, this hypothesis could only be substantiated by pottery analysis. The latter does not seem to allow for a diachronically fine dating.

57. Figurine fragments are mentioned in passing by Beit-Arieh, *Ḥorvat Qitmit* (n. 11), 24, but I could not identify a single fragment in Beck's catalogue (n. 12) nor in the appendix compiled by L. Freud (*ibid.*, 198-208).

58. See above, n. 38, and D. S. Vanderhooft, "The Edomite Dialect and Script: A Review of the Evidence," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite* (n. 32), 137-57, esp. 138 ("extreme south cursive script"). But note that another vessel fragment inscribed before firing which was found in complex A shows a "Phoenician" or rather "Philistine"-type 'alef: Beit-Arieh, *Ḥorvat Qitmit* (n. 12), 259.

59. Had we only complex B, we would conclude to some 'aniconic' cult, but this optical illusion is of course due only to a heuristic operation.

60. I. Beit-Arieh and B. Cresson, "An Edomite Ostrakon from Ḥorvat 'Uza," *TA* 12 (1985): 96-101; Vanderhooft, "The Edomite Dialect and Script" (n. 58), 142-43.

61. E. A. Knauf, "Qōs," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. B. Becking, P. W. van der Horst, K. van der Toorn (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 674-77, esp. 675, following J. R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, JSOTSup 77 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 213 n. 4.

62. Note (a) the references to Yahweh's "coming out from Teman/Se'ir/Edom" (Hab. 3:3-7; Deut. 33:2-3; Judg. 5:4-5), i.e., Qaus's homeland; (b) the absence of religious polemic against Qaus; and (c) the strong notion of "brotherhood" with Edom.

63. See Dearman, "Edomite Religion" (n. 32), 123-27, citation on 127.

a tripartite main building, a large plastered courtyard delimited by a kind of temenos wall, a basin-like installation, and a large horizontally placed stone which the excavators interpreted as an altar. It is in Complex A exclusively that the stands and statuary were found, mainly in the enclosure area. In contrast to the apparently 'monolatric' setting of complex B, the evidence of complex A points to a 'polytheistic' and polymorphous cult. It is tempting to assume that the three parallel oblong rooms of building I had votives and offerings for three different deities, but the evidence is inconclusive. The three rooms may as well have belonged to three different groups of worshippers. That more than one deity was venerated besides the as yet anonymous three-horned goddess can be clearly demonstrated: The fragment of a statue which held the hilt of a sword (fig. 6)⁶⁴ is unlikely to have belonged to a worshipper according to a basic principle of ancient Near Eastern religious iconography and ritual etiquette.⁶⁵ Other figures representing deities—such as a deity standing on a lion⁶⁶—were applied to stands. Shrine models, some of them displaying moulded plaque figurines of the 'nude pregnant woman' type, may have contained further cult images.⁶⁷ These would have been taken from the site when it was abandoned, unless they were made of wood and have thus disintegrated. Various animals depicted on cult stands (e.g., lions, bulls, ibexes, ostriches) may point to different deities. Beck has interpreted the apparent differences in status among these various deities by referring to the concept of resident and 'visiting gods.'⁶⁸ One could as well consider

64. Beck, "Catalogue" (n. 12), 62-63 no. 46 (and possibly *ibid.*, nos. 45 and 47).

65. This statement requires some further comment since the issue has been raised that on imperial Hittite representations a king with a dagger or sword at his belt could appear in worship in front of a deity.

First, the Hittite examples are quite far removed in time and place from the statuary under consideration, and it would be difficult to demonstrate a connection between the two sets of evidence. On the contrary, scenes of worship on images from Palestine and from first millennium repertoires that had a demonstrable impact on Palestine (e.g., Egyptian, Phoenician, Aramaean, and Assyro-Babylonian iconography) never show, to the best of my knowledge, a worshipper holding a dagger or a sword. Second, there is of course a difference between a weapon carried at the waist and the actual gesture of holding a dagger or sword with one hand in an attitude which denotes potential readiness to use it. Still, one must admit that our knowledge of Arab (and Edomite) iconography of the late Iron Age is sparse. We cannot exclude the possibility that it followed a different iconographic convention (possibly reflecting a different custom in actual cultic behavior) with regard to the representation of worshippers in arms. The three statues from 'En Ḥaṣeva and those from Wadi ath-Thamad (see below) were apparently unarmed. As it stands, the available evidence favors the assumption that the fragment once belonged to the statue of a deity.

66. Beck, "Catalogue" (n. 12), no. 110.

67. *Ibid.*, nos. 107-8, 163, 203-10, 763, 765-67, 771, 773.

68. *Ibid.*, 187-88.

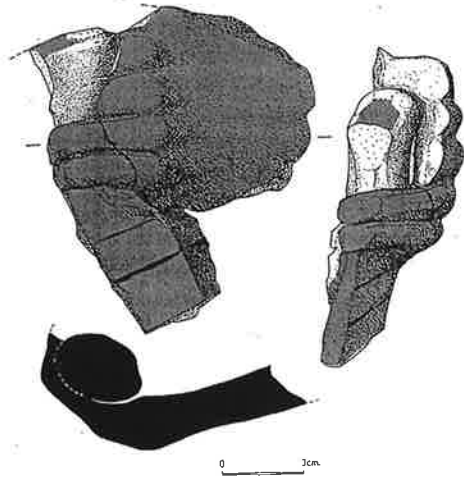


FIGURE 6: Fragment of an anthropomorphic statue grasping the hilt of a sword (Beck, "Catalogue" [n. 12], 63 fig. 3.35). Courtesy Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University.

relating the differences in status and function to the notion of various tiers within the divine world.⁶⁹

Most importantly, although the bulk of cultic objects was produced locally, the Qitmit sanctuary seems to have hosted a rather inclusive community of gods and worshippers which was open for occasional traveling visitors who could deposit objects brought from some distance (the Southern coastal plain, Transjordan, or Edom proper). Beck has conclusively demonstrated that the Qitmit iconography is related to a far greater variety of models than just to Edomite ones. These include implied references to Phoenicia (Sarepta), Philistia (Ashdod), Transjordan as far as Ammon, and Tell es-Sa'idiyeh. Clearly the Edomite connection is not the only one we should account for at Qitmit. Given the wider exchange patterns that became usual in the Levant with the advent of the so-called *pax Assyriaca*, this broad pattern of 'influences' (or, as I would prefer to say, references) in the Qitmit repertory is not too difficult to understand, but it significantly weakens the site's exclusively "Edomite" ascription.

In fact, what has come to be considered as particularly "Edomite" in recent years may once more be part of an optical illusion. To take but one example, the "Edomite" ascription of the characteristic Qitmit-type vessel statuary has been stressed and even more so since the publication of three more examples from 'En Haṣeva. But this type of vessel statuary has Late Bronze Age forerunners from central Palestine, and isolated contemporary parallels are known from Judahite Tel 'Erani and Jerusalem.⁷⁰ Beck of course knew and acknowledged the latter, but she apparently

69. Cf. Mark Smith's contribution in the present volume.

70. Sh. Yeivin, *First Preliminary Report on the Excavations at Tel Gat (Tell Sheykh 'Ahmed*

considered them as insignificant stray finds. Recently, more such statuary has come to light at Tell Abu al-Ḥaraz in the northern Jordan valley⁷¹ and at site #13 in the vicinity of Ḥirbet al-Mudaynah in Wadi ath-Thamad, northern Moab (seven or eight items apparently belonging to a cult site).⁷² We may conclude with reasonable certitude that this type of statuary does not reflect an exclusively Edomite but a more widespread South Levantine tradition.

One of the most basic and intriguing methodological problems of the site's interpretation lies in the relative weight given to so-called "utilitarian vessels" vs. so-called "cultic objects." The excavation report dissociates the former, which are discussed by Beit-Arieh, from the latter which are analyzed by Beck. To some extent, the distinction is artificial. The cultic objects obviously had a utilitarian meaning, too, within the ritual, be it as votives or the focus of worship, offering, and prayer. Conversely, bowls, cups, kraters, and other utilitarian vessels obtain a cultic significance the very moment that they are used within a ritual. The dissociation of the two categories obliterates the fact that they were actually found *together* in a definitely cultic context (note particularly loc. 30). They should thus be interpreted together as one single set of evidence—not only when we study the ritual practices and their symbolism, but also when we address the cultural or 'ethnic' background of the worshippers.

According to Beit-Arieh's discussion of the "utilitarian pottery," the latter includes a very large percentage of vessels in shapes that are generally considered typically Judahite, notably more numerous than vessels which are held to be of a distinctly "Edomite" type. To illustrate this point only with the bowls (i.e. the class of vessels which is attested in greatest quantity): Bowls at Qitmit include shapes with turned-over rim (a type considered characteristically "Judahite," found at all Judean sites dating from the eighth-sixth centuries); they constitute c. 50% of all the bowls found at Qitmit.⁷³ Shapes with flaring walls or so-called shallow bowls

el-'Areyne), Seasons 1956-1958 (Jerusalem: Department of Antiquities, 1961), pl. III:3; A. D. Tushingham, *Excavations in Jerusalem 1961-1967*, vol. 1 (London—Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1985), 18, 292, 356 fig. 4:10.

71. See P. M. Fischer, "Tall Abū al-Kharaz: The Swedish Jordan Expedition 1992. Third Season Preliminary Excavation Report," *ADAJ* 38 (1994): 127-45, esp. 130-33, 137 fig. 6:1.

72. I thank P. M. Michèle Daviau (Wilfred Laurier University) for sharing then unpublished information with me. See eadem, "Moab's Northern Border. Khirbat al-Mudayna on the Wadi ath-Thamad," *BA* 60 (1997): 222-28, esp. 225-26, and now eadem, "New Light on Iron Age Religious Iconography: The Evidence from Moab," in *SHAJ* VII (Amman 1999): 317-26; eadem, "Family Religion: Evidence for the Paraphernalia of the Domestic Cult," in *The World of the Aramaeans* (FS P.-E. Dion; JSOTSup 325), ed. P. M. Michèle Daviau, J. W. Wevers, M. Weigl, vol. II, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, 199-229; eadem, M. Steiner, "A Moabite Sanctuary at Khirbat al-Mudayna," *BASOR* 320 (2000): 1-21.

73. Beit-Arieh, *Horvat Qitmit* (n. 11), 210.

are also designated as "Judahite" types. Other types such as bowls with flat rim or carinated bowls are more rarely attested in central Judea but quite common both in southern Judea, the Negev and southern Transjordan.⁷⁴ They underline the essentially regional character of much of the Qitmit assemblage, but represent a smaller percentage than the shapes considered definitely "Judahite." The painted and denticulated items usually considered as the hallmark of "Edomite" pottery represent only 2% of the bowls.⁷⁵

The 'ethnic' (let alone 'national') labeling of so-called "Edomite" pottery has been questioned by P. Bienkowski, a leading expert in this field, and other scholars. It ultimately goes back to N. Glueck who had first found this pottery at Buseirah and other sites in southern Transjordan. It was only considerably later that it turned up in the Negev too. In Bienkowski's opinion, "Edomite pottery"

is an unfortunate term that has caused confusion . . . Just because this pottery is called "Edomite" does not mean that wherever it is found it must be Edomite. There is insufficient evidence to indicate that this pottery was confined to a specific ethnic group, rather than being the standard Iron II . . . painted pottery of an area extending beyond Edom proper. The new term that has been proposed is "Buseirah painted ware," which has no ethnic presuppositions, just as elsewhere in the Near East reference is made to "Jemdet Nasr pottery."⁷⁶

Bienkowski's vigorous rejection of the labeling of Qitmit as an "Edomite shrine" comes as no surprise.⁷⁷

The cultural affiliation of the "utilitarian vessels" has to be taken into account when we consider the pottery which is more specifically or even exclusively related to cult and ritual. According to Beck's analysis of both manufacturing techniques and iconography, the cultic objects from Qitmit are of a distinctly "non-Judahite" character. I submit that this judgment results once more from an optical illusion created by the artificial splitting of the evidence into "utilitarian" and "cultic" objects, a distinction which makes little sense at a site like Qitmit where almost every bit of evidence had in some way a cult-related function. Did the worshippers of Qitmit acquire their "utilitarian" bowls, kraters, and cups in Judah, look for cooking-pots and cult inventory in Edom and supplement their repertory by a few acquisitions of Philistine provenance? I can

74. *Ibid.* 211-12.

75. *Ibid.* 213.

76. "The Edomites: The Archaeological Evidence from Transjordan," in *You Shall Not Abhor* (n. 32), 41-92, citation on 51.

77. *Idem*, review of Beit-Arieh, *Horvat Qitmit* (n. 11), *PEQ* 130 (1998): 69-70, and see now P. Bienkowski, E. van der Steen, "Tribes, Trade, and Towns: A New Framework for the Late Iron Age in Southern Jordan and the Negev," *BASOR* 323 (2001): 21-47.

hardly imagine that such were the shopping habits of late Iron Age Negebites. As mentioned earlier, INAA analysis has shown that most of the vessels found at Qitmit were produced from local clay, i.e. by implication, by craftsmen employed in one or several local workshops. This fact forces us to re-define the issue of cultural 'influence': we rather deal with craft traditions which could spread from various centers and be adopted at an intermediary meeting-place by local workshops. One possibility to account for such spreading of techniques, styles and motives from various areas is to assume the existence of itinerant craftsmen moving along major trade routes in an attempt to open new markets for their products. Such itinerant specialists have repeatedly been hypothesized for more sophisticated crafts such as metalwork or glyptics, but there is no reason for categorically excluding potters from such a model. More important, yet, is the recognition that the Qitmit sanctuary's "Edomite" ascription rests on insufficient evidence and unproven assumptions.

What about its "non-Judahite" character? Beck's opinion on this was based on a twin argument: (a) the complete absence at Qitmit, according to her study, of Judahite figurines; (b) "the complete absence of human figures from Judaeans and Israelite sites during the Iron age."⁷⁸ Besides the fact that both are arguments *e silentio*, and thus not very weighty, there is an obvious contradiction here: The first statement implies the existence of distinctly "Judahite" figurines elsewhere, of which Beck was well aware. Consequently, we must rephrase the second statement to "the complete absence of *anthropomorphic cultic statuary* from Judaeans and Israelite sites during the Iron age." This statement, however, is problematic as I have argued elsewhere.⁷⁹ At the end of the day, only the first argument can be received.

Beck was undoubtedly right in pointing out the differences between the Qitmit repertory and the figurines commonly related to Judah. As a matter of fact, Qitmit has not produced any distinctly 'Judahite' figurine, be it a Judean pillar or a horse-and-rider figurine. However, what does this mean? The 'national' classification of Judahite figurines largely rests upon late eighth and earlier seventh century material. We should also not forget that what we generally label Judahite figurines first of all represents the Jerusalem and the Shephelah markets. These have seldom been the first providers of goods (and thus, influences in technology or iconography) to the inhabitants of the northern Negev. That Judahite figurines were found at Arad demonstrates that people living in this peripheral fortress were connected to genuinely Judahite production centers (Jerusalem, Lachish, and possibly Tell Beit Mirsim). In contrast, this does

78. "Catalogue" (n. 12), 182.

79. Uehlinger, "Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary" (n. 6); although much of the evidence collected there is admittedly circumstantial, it cannot be ignored.

not seem to have been the case for the Qitmit worshippers. Still, one should note that plaque or pillar-base figurines as well as horse-and-rider figurines of *any* regional or 'national' appurtenance are conspicuously lacking at Qitmit. There may be reasons other than 'ethnicity' to account for the absence of certain types of figurines from the site.

I would concede that Beck was partly right insofar as most inhabitants of the Malhata and Qitmit area during the late Iron Age would probably not have considered themselves 'Judahites'—but neither, for that matter, 'Edomites.'

Conclusions

Unlike Arad, Qitmit is a one-period site that seems to have functioned during a limited time-span of one or two generations. Whether the site was contemporary with the Arad fortress shrine cannot be firmly determined today mainly because of the uncertainties over the latter's chronology. However, if we can narrow down the dating of Qitmit to the later seventh century, we should probably not go far beyond 600 B.C.E. Beit-Arieh's Edomite invasion model and Lemaire's chronological scheme are entirely dependent on their concept of Judahite-Edomite rivalry and on the ill-founded ethnic labeling of the archaeological finds. Once we abandon the premises of such an essentially antagonistic model, there is no difficulty whatsoever to accept a contemporaneous existence of the two sites and cults. Finkelstein has plausibly argued that the flourishing of late Iron Age Negev settlements was related to the commercial activities linking the southern Levant to the Red Sea and Arabia. This trade came to a rather brutal end with the massive destruction of the cities in the Philistine coastal plain by Nebuchadnezzar II in the years 604/603 B.C.E. If J. Cahill is right in ascribing the rosette stamp impressions to the time of Yehoaqim,⁸⁰ the collapse of the Philistine network and Nebuchadnezzar's 601 Sinai fiasco were exploited by Judah during a very short time in a revolt that did not last. After 598 and until the progressive re-opening of the frankincense road towards the middle of the century under the reign of Nabonidus, there was insufficient material basis for permanent settlement in the Negev. This is the main reason why both the settlement of Tel Malhata and the regional sanctuary of Qitmit were abandoned.

I have tried to demonstrate that the dichotomic contrasting of Arad

80. "Rosette Stamp Seal Impressions from Ancient Judah," *IEJ* 45 (1995): 230-52.

and Qitmit in recent discussions has led to relatively unproductive and misleading results. The Arad evidence is incomplete, partly unpublished, and it cannot be taken as a representative, even less as a typical sample of Judahite cult. Qitmit, on the other hand, should not be used in a dichotomic way to support the claim of Judahite aniconism, but rather understood as *complementary* evidence which discloses another, equally important segment of the religious history of southern Palestine. Though the martial symbolism of some major statues from Qitmit cannot be overlooked, the site generally hints at ritual practices of farmers and herds-men. These people, neither genuine Judahites nor Edomites, probably cared more about their living *in between* Judahite garrisons and Edomite raiders and caravaneers than about their own particular 'nationality' or 'ethnicity.'

Let us finally come back to the problem of Judahite (or Israelite) iconolatry. The growth of the biblical tradition prohibiting the production and use of cultic images—first idols, then votive statuary, later even sculpted stones and *massebot*—evidences a debate on the use of different kinds of 'images' in worship over several generations within the religious history of Judah and Judahite Yahwism. Such debate is unthinkable without respective knowledge and practice (see introduction, premise 2). It is unfortunate that after more than a century of archaeological excavations we still have only very limited archaeological evidence for iconic cults from Judah proper. We should not forget, however, that negative evidence is provisional by definition and experience: recall how drastically the finds from Qitmit and 'En Haseva have re-shaped the mainstream perception of "Edomite religion" within only a decade. Now Qitmit is certainly *not* a Judahite (nor, I argue, an Edomite) site, but a fascinating regional sanctuary in the northern Negev. While geographically it would have been well within the reach of the Judahite administration, it did not belong to Judah proper. Still, for the time being and pending more conclusive finds from Judah, it may serve as our next-placed example to illustrate—by way of analogy and with all due caution—how an extra-settlement Judahite *bamah* might have looked in the late Iron Age.⁸¹ To stress unduly Qitmit's "non-Judahite" character not only misrepresents the factual situation. It also obliterates a bulk of *potential* evidence for the history of Judahite religions, a religious history which cannot be understood in isolation from its broader regional context. In this sense, Qitmit has also opened new perspectives for biblical scholars to think over the

81. But see B. Alpert Nakhai, "What's a Bamah? How Sacred Space Functioned in Ancient Israel," *BAR* 20, no. 3 (1993): 18-29, 77-78.

exilic and post-exilic history of the biblical image ban. We should not separate what belongs together as different aspects of ultimately one South Levantine historical reality: the statuary and the standing stones, the stands and the bowls, the figurines and the cooking-pots—nor, for that matter and period, “Yahweh of the South” and Qaus. But artifacts and images will reveal ancient religion only on the condition that we are willing to accept them plainly as serious witnesses.

II

Royal Cult