Nabonidus, as-Silaʿ, and the Beginning of the End of Edom

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The collapse of the Iron Age polity of Edom is often attributed to the western campaign of the Babylonian king Nabonidus, who traveled through Edom en route to the desert oasis of Tayma. The campaign is mentioned in several Babylonian texts, and his entrance into Edom is typically dated to 553 B.C.E., based on several fragmentary lines in the Nabonidus Chronicle. With the discovery and publication of a heavily eroded rock relief of Nabonidus at as-Silaʿ in the mountains of southern Jordan, it is confirmed that Nabonidus campaigned through the region of Edom. This article argues that, based on the few fragmentary lines of the accompanying inscription, the attack of Nabonidus on Edom can be more precisely dated to his fifth year, or 551 B.C.E.

INTRODUCTION

The decline and collapse of the small Iron Age polity of Edom is obscured by a lack of substantial historical sources.[1] Apart from a handful of seals and letters from Edom, scholars are dependent upon the written records of Edom's neighbors. The vivid condemnations of Edom found in the Hebrew Bible are descriptions from Judah, Edom's northwestern neighbor. Imperial records from Assyria mention a few kings of Edom and their tribute to the empire. Recently, interest in the rise of Edom has increased due to recent excavations, debates over early Iron Age chronology related to Israel, and several important surveys in the pivotal copper-mining district in the Wadi Arabah. Yet there is relatively little interest in the decline of Edom. Most written sources regarding Edom's demise are embedded within the intense anti-Edomite polemics found in the biblical prophetic material. Several scholars have suggested that some Edomite cities were destroyed or partially destroyed in the mid-to-late sixth century B.C.E., including Busayra, Tawilan, and Tall al-Khalayfi. These destructions are discussed below, but with the information currently available, both archaeological and textual, it is impossible to prove these correlations. With the discovery of a rock carved relief at as-Silaʿ in southern Jordan near the central Edomite fortified site of Busayra (biblical Bozrah), reevaluations of theories of the decline and fall of the Edomite polity can proceed on firmer ground.

HISTORY AND SOCIETY IN IRON AGE EDOM

Although Edom flourished in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. under Assyrian hegemony, recent excavations in the Wadi Arabah have ignited a new debate about Edom in the Early Iron Age.[2] By

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[2] This debate is beyond the scope of this paper, but a brief summary is appropriate. Recently, Thomas Levy et al. (2003; 2004; 2005; Levy and Najjar 2006a; 2006b) published the preliminary results of several excavations in the Wadi Arabah. According to
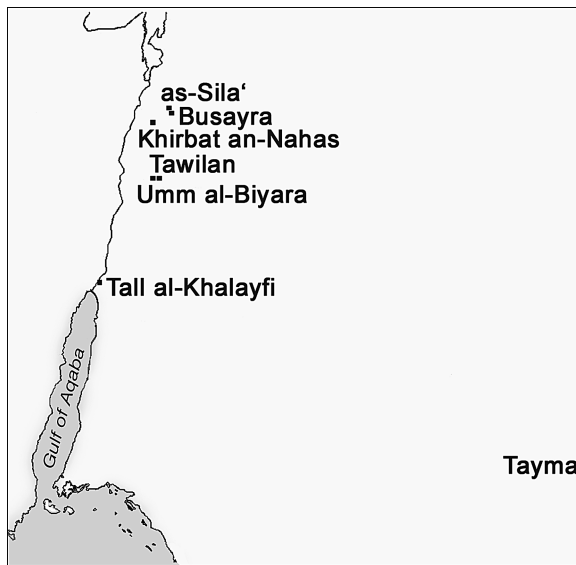
Fig. 1. Map of locations mentioned in the text.

the late eighth century B.C.E., the shadow of the Assyrians loomed on the horizon, and Edom's leaders, called "kings" by the Assyrians, began to pay tribute to maintain a beneficent relationship with the empire. It was during this period that the majority of Edomite sites were established in the mountainous region to the east of the Arabah.[3]

The political organization in Iron Age Edom, centered at the largest (8.16 ha) walled settlement of Busayra, never attained control of the entire region of southern Transjordan (fig. 1). There was only a "thin veneer" of a state in Edom, maintained through kin relations and an ineffective attempt to project the authority of the ruling elite through its visible links to the Assyrians (cf. Knauf-Belleri 1995; Bienkowski 1995: 56, 61–62; 2001a: 267). Architectural

and symbolic similarities with Assyrian-style buildings, especially the Area A temple and the Area C palace (see Bienkowski 2002: 478–79 for comparisons), illustrate that the Busayra elite attempted to make such links. Except for the settlement at Busayra, the Edomite sites were primarily small agricultural villages. Only 11 sites in Edom were between 1 and 2 ha in size, but these are substantially smaller than the central, fortified village of Busayra.[4] Only in the copper-mining regions in the Wadi Arabah does there appear to have been any substantial organization. In fact, some scholars (cf. Knauf-Belleri 1995) suggest that the numerous mountaintop settlements in the Petra area were centers of resistance against the Busayra elite, the Assyrians, or both. Throughout their history, the Edomite leaders at Busayra were dependent upon external forces to maintain their fragile grasp on regional authority. Once the central settlement of Busayra was defeated, the weak centralizing forces in Edom would diminish and eventually collapse. The harsh terrain of Edom, the relationship with the Assyrians maintained by regular tribute, and the weak attempts to establish their own defenses always protected those in power at Busayra. What led to the collapse of this small, decentralized polity in the Edomite highlands? Archaeologists and biblical scholars have proposed two theories over the course of the 20th century.

THEORIES ON THE
END OF EDOM

Nelson Glueck was the most significant figure in Transjordanian archaeology for the first half of the 20th century. While he excavated only one Iron Age site, Tall al-Khalayfi in 1938–1940, his surveys of southern Jordan became the basis for his reconstruction of Edomite history and society which has influenced a generation of biblical scholars and historians. He situated the beginning of Edomite settlement in the 13th century B.C.E. This "thriving, prosperous, civilized kingdom" (Glueck 1947: 80) survived until the eighth century B.C.E.. According to Glueck's understanding of the biblical account of David's defeat and occupation of Edom (2 Sam

Levy, finds at the Wadi Fidan 40 cemetery (Levy, Adams, and Shafiq 1999) and Khirbat an-Nahas (Levy et al. 2004) suggest that the beginning of social organization developed in the 11th and 10th centuries B.C.E. around the copper resources along the Wadi Arabah. Until Levy publishes complete reports, with pottery and stratigraphy, several other scenarios are possible, including Egyptian or Midianite occupations, or local attempts to exploit the resource. Needless to say, Levy's interpretation has been extensively criticized by Finkelstein (2005), Finkelstein and Piasetzky (2006: 379–80), and van der Steen and Bienkowski (2006). See Levy and Najjar 2006a; 2006b; and Levy, Higham, and Najjar 2006, for their most recent responses.

[3] For surveys of the archaeological and textual evidence on Edom in the Iron Age, see Bienkowski 1992; 1995; 2001b.

[4] In addition to Tawilan and Tall al-Khalayfi, discussed below, this short list includes Umm ar-Rih, al-Addanin, Hiblan Salim, Khirbat al-Burays, Khirbat Abu Banna, Khirbat al-Fatat, ad-Dayr, al-Mabra, and Khirbat at-Tuwaneh. None of these villages have been excavated or studied beyond surveys.

8:12–14; 1 Kgs 11:15–16), the powerful United Monarchy in Israel in the 10th century B.C.E. and the subsequent Judaean kingdom often controlled Edom's destiny. After centuries of periodic occupation and rebellion, Edom was weakened. According to Glueck, Edom was rarely independent, but after the attack by Amaziah of Judah on Selaᶜ (2 Kgs 14:7; 2 Chr 25:11–14), Edom declined until the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II finally destroyed it.[5]

Nearly 30 years ago Lindsay (1976) and Bartlett (1989: 147–61; 1982; 1972) formulated the standard current theory. On the basis of biblical prophetic texts, scholars surmise that Edom participated in the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C.E. (see Obadiah; Psalms 137; Ezekiel 35–36; cf. 1 Esd 4:45), although the level of involvement is debated. At the very least, Edom did not come to the aid of Jerusalem at a time when the Judaean leaders expected its treaty partner to help defend against the Babylonian assault. As a result of Edom's involvement, or lack of support for Jerusalem, the Edomites survived the attack of Nebuchadnezzar and even expanded west of the Arabah into previously held Judaean territory (Bartlett 1999; Lindsay 1999).[6] The Edomite elite took advantage of the realignment of power in the southern Levant to accelerate their involvement in the trade routes that passed through their territory into the northern Negev. The heightened economic prosperity lasted about 30 years for Edom, until Nabonidus undertook his western campaign and occupied Tayma in northern Arabia.

Only Lindsay (1976) has attempted to collect the Babylonian evidence related to this period in Edomite history. Lindsay surveyed the textual and archaeological material relevant to the relations between Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar II and Nabonidus, and Edom. He concluded that Edom became intimately involved in the Babylonian attack on Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C.E. in order to gain control over some of Judah's territory in the south. According to Lindsay, Edom survived until the mid-sixth century B.C.E., and since Nabonidus was the reigning Babylonian king at that time, he was responsible for the destruction of Edom. Lindsay concluded that with the desire of Nabonidus to control Arabian commerce, he attacked the Edomite centers of Busayra and Tall al-Khalayfi (possibly biblical Ezion-geber) in the course of his campaign to Tayma. Most scholars have followed this basic framework, with appropriate qualifiers, since the Babylonian text Lindsay invoked to suggest that Nabonidus was the culprit is heavily damaged (see Bienkowski 1995: 60, 62; 2001a: 266; 2001b: 269; Knauf and Lenzen 1987; Knauf-Belleri 1995: 110–11, 114).

BIBLICAL SOURCES ON THE FATE OF EDOM

Even the biblical narratives do not present a coherent picture of Edom's demise. Some scholars believe that Edom was complicit in several attacks on Jerusalem during the early Neo-Babylonian period (Lindsay 1976; Bartlett 1989: 149–55). Support for this theory, developed in part to explain the intense anti-Edomite bias in the prophetic literature (e.g., Obadiah; Isaiah 34–35), is found in 2 Kgs 24:2, which states that "Yahweh let loose against (Jehoiakim) the raiding bands of the Chaldeans, Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites." This verse is often emended from *gĕdûdê ʾărām* to *gĕdûdê ʾĕdōm* with the Arabic and Peshitta versions (Bartlett 1989: 148–49; 1982: 16; 1999: 102–3; Lindsay 1999: 58–61). If the reconstructed text is followed, Edom sent raiding parties against Jerusalem in 599 or 598 B.C.E. while Jehoiakim was king. Later in 594 B.C.E., Zedekiah, the Babylonian appointee whose name was changed from Mattaniah, held a meeting in Jerusalem with the kings of Edom, Ammon, and Moab, and with the rulers of the two Phoenician cities, Tyre and Sidon, to discuss a strategy of resistance against Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 27). Edom and the other Transjordanian polities apparently did not participate in the seditious acts against the Babylonian, but Zedekiah's activities ultimately led to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Little is said in the biblical text of Edom's fate after Nebuchadnezzar's attack on Jerusalem, but the Edomites are blamed for taking advantage of the situation and expanding into Judaean cities west of the Arabah (see recently Bartlett 1999; Lindsay 1999). Although Edom apparently sheltered Judaean refugees during this period (Jer 40:11; Bartlett 1982: 18), later traditions condemned Edom for aiding the

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[5] Glueck commented on the history of Edom throughout his writings, including his excavation and survey reports. See Glueck 1936; 1940; 1946; 1947; 1970: 161–67, for convenient summaries of his ideas on the history of Edom.

[6] For information on the Edomite presence in southern Judah in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E., derived largely from the Aramaic ostraca from Idumea, see Naveh 1973; 1979; 1981; Ephᶜal and Naveh 1996; Lemaire 1994; 1996; 1997; 2002; Aḥituv 1999; Aḥituv and Yardeni 2004; and Lozachmeur and Lemaire 1996.

Babylonians and even for burning the Jerusalem temple to the ground (1 Esd 4:45). Edom's precise role in the downfall of Jerusalem is not as relevant here as the point that it did survive the campaigns of Nebuchadnezzar in the southern Levant during the early sixth century B.C.E. and remained in power while the Judaean elite was exiled to Babylon.

NABONIDUS AND THE
ARABIAN CAMPAIGN

The one unifying factor of contemporary scenarios proposed for the end of Edom is that it involved the western campaign of Nabonidus as he traveled to Tayma in northern Arabia (fig. 1).[7] Although four different Babylonian texts mention this event, none of them are without difficulty. The "Arabian sojourn" is found in the *Nabonidus Chronicle* (BM 35382), the *Royal Chronicle* (BM 34896 + 34375 + 34995 + 34167 + Sp0), the *Verse Account of Nabonidus* (BM 38299), and the *Harran Stele* (Nab H2). Unfortunately, the operations of Nabonidus between the time that he and his troops left southern Syria and his arrival in Tayma remain largely unknown due to the limited historical sources.

The most important source for the route of Nabonidus from Syria to Arabia is the *Nabonidus Chronicle* (see Grayson 1975: 104, for publication information). The text begins with the march of Nabonidus and his armies against rebellious forces in Syria and then narrates his campaign south to Tayma. While the text details some events in each year of his reign, the left edge of column 1 is destroyed, so the first extant year is the seventh in which Nabonidus was already in Tayma (ii.5). The previous years are all reconstructed from other texts. According to the typical reconstruction of the reign of Nabonidus, in his third year (553 B.C.E.) he campaigned west to put down a revolt.[8] After defeating the rebellious forces at Ammanānu (the southern part of Ǧabal Anṣārīya; Zadok 1985: 22), he sent lucrative local products back to Babylon. Apparently during the same year, Nabonidus became ill and quickly recovered (i.14) before marching to Amurru (i.16). Still in his third year, Nabonidus sieged Edom and

defeated the city of Šintīni, which remains unidentified (Zadok 1985: 294, 318). If this reconstruction of events is correct, Nabonidus entered Edom in late 553 or early 552 B.C.E.. The most relevant section for his march through Edom is at the end of column 1 (lines 11–22).

i.11 [mu-3-kám . . . . ⁱ]ᵗⁱne ᵏᵘʳ*am-ma-na-nu šá-di-i*
12. [. . . ..] ᵍⁱˢ*ṣip-pa-a-tú* gurun *ma-la ba-šu-ú*
13. [. . . . .] *ina lìb-bi-ši-na ana qé-reb* eᵏⁱ
14. [. . . . . . lugal g]ig-*ma* tin-uṭ *ina* ⁱᵗⁱgan lugal érin-*šú*
15. [*id-ke-e-ma*? . . .]-*tim u ana* ᵈnà ᵈnà-*tat-tan*-šeš
16. [. . . ..] x *mu šá* ᵏᵘʳmar.tu *a-na*
17. [. .. . . . ᵏᵘʳ*ú*]-*du-um-mu it-ta-du-ú*
18. [. . . ..]-*ma* érinᵐᵉˢ *ma-du-tu*
19. [. . . .. k]á.gal ᵘʳᵘ*šin-ti-ni*
20. [. .. . . g]az-*šú*
21. [. . . . .] x *qu*
22. [. . . . . é]rinᵐᵉˢ

[The third year . . . . . . the mon]th of Abu, the land of Ammananu, the mountains [. . . ..] orchards, all of the fruit within them [. . . . ..] to Babylon. [. . . . .. the king became] ill, but he recovered. In the month of Kislīmu, the king [summoned] the army [and . . . . ..] and to Nabu-tattannu-utsur [. . . . .] of the land of Amurru, to [. . . . ..] they set up camps [against the land of E]dom. [. . . ..] the large armies [. . . .. the g]ate of Šintīni [. . . .. he ki]lled him [. . . ..] x [. . . ..] the armies.

In 1968 W. G. Lambert published a fragmentary text that he dubbed the "Royal Chronicle" of Nabonidus (most recent edition is Schaudig 2001: 590–95, text P4).[9] In addition to an account of the rebuilding of the temple in Sippar, this broken text narrates the campaign of Nabonidus against Ammanānu in Syria and his subsequent trip to Arabia. The Chronicle adds some important information that was lacking in the *Nabonidus Chronicle*—namely, that the attack on Ammanānu took place in the third year of his reign, or 553 B.C.E. (iv.26). This text is the basis for the reconstruction of the third year in the *Nabonidus Chronicle* (i.11). The relevant section of the *Royal*

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[7] For recent evidence from Tayma on the sojourn of Nabonidus there, see Gruntfest and Heltzer 2001; Muller and al-Said 2001; Hayajneh 2001; Lemaire 1995.

[8] Nabonidus gathered his troops for the campaign in the month of Kislīmu or December of 553 B.C.E.

[9] The hand copy of new fragment (Sp 0) that continues the end of column 4 is published in Schaudig 2001: Abb. 60.

Chronicle occurs at the end of column 4 and the remaining section of column 5.

iv.26 . . . *ina* ^{iti}gu₄ mu-3-kám

27. [. . . . . . tin.]tir^{ki} *pa-ni* érin^{me}-*šú iṣ-ba-tu*

28. [. . . . . . *i*]*d-ke-e-ma ina* 13-*ta* u₄-*mu a-na*

29. [*ša*[?]-*di*[?]]-*i ik-šu-du šá* un^{meš} *a-ši-bi* ^{uru}am-ma-na-nu

30. [. . . . .-*š*]*ú-nu* sag.du^{meš}-*šú-nu ú-bat-tíq-ma*

32. [lugal *ina g*]*a-ši-šú i-lu-ul-ma*

33. [. . . . .]-*at* kur-*i* [*ú-za*]-*az* uru

34. [. . . . .] *šá qé-reb* kur^{meš} gurun ^{giš}kiri₆^m[^{eš} du.a.bi]

35. [. . . . .] *ṣi-li-ši-nu* [*it*- . . . . . .]

36. [. . . . .] [*a*]-*na gi-mi-ri-šú* ^dbil.g[i]

37. [*ú-šaq-mi* . . .]-[x]-*tú šá mé-la-šú-nu ru-ú-q*[*u*]

38. [. . . . .] [*a*]-*na* u₄-*mu ṣa-a-tú ú-šá-lik*

39. [*kar-mu-tú* . . .] x-*šá-a-šú né-re-bé-e-ti*

40. [. . . . .] u₄-*mu i-zi-i*[*b*] [rest of column is broken]

In the month of Ayyaru of the third year, [when] he led his troops [from] Babylon, he summoned them and in thirteen days they reached [the mountains]. They [. . .] of the people who lived in Ammanānu. [. . .], he cut off their heads, he hung [the king on a s]take, [. . .] he divided up the land. The city of [. . .] which is in the midst of the lands, all of the fruit of the orchards. [. . .] their shade [. . .], he burned everything with fire, he made it into a ruin forever [. . .] their entrance [. . .] he allowed to remain [. . .].

After defeating the men of Ammanānu, Nabonidus continued on his campaign to the south. After a break at the end of column 4 and at least 12 fragmentary lines in column 5, the *Royal Chronicle* mentions the difficult terrain that Nabonidus encountered en route to Dadanu in Arabia.

v. 13 [. . . . .] x šeš-šu érin.hi.[a-*š*]*ú*

14. [. . . . .] x ^{giš}tukul *iš-ši-ma ana* x [. . . . . .]

15. [. . . . . da]nna *qaq-aq-ri ur-hi pa-áš-qu-tú*

16. [. . . . . *qaq-q*]*a-ri nam-ra-ṣa*

17. [*a-šar kib-su šu-up-ru*]-*su-ma* gìr.min *la i-ba-áš-šu-u*

18. [. . . . .] *a-na zi-kir šu-mi-i-šú*

19. [. . . . .] x gi edin.na.a

20. [. . . . . ^m]^{eš} lugal *šá da-da-na*

21. [. . . . . ^m]^{eš} *né-su-tú in-né-riq*

22. [. . . . . *ú*]-*kap-pir-m*[*a*]

x [hi]s armies [. . . . .] he carried the weapon to [. . . . .] distant leagues, difficult routes [. . . . .], terrain of hardship [where passage is preven]ted and no feet go [. . . . .] at the mention of his name [. . . . .] of the steppe [. . . . .] the king of Dadanu [. . . . .] he fled[10] to a distant place . . . he cleared away (the land) . . .

Lindsay (1976: 34, 36) suggested that the beginning of column 5 described the campaign of Nabonidus through Edom. With the publication of the join at the end of column 4 (Sp 0), this remains a possibility. Column 4, lines 26–30 record the defeat of Ammanānu, its king, the plundering of its resources, and the division of its land. Unfortunately, no place names or personal names survive in column 5 until the mention of the king of Dadanu. Yet some of the words within this section describe a terrain that is appropriate for the mountainous region of Edom, including "difficult routes" (v 15), "terrain of hardship" (v 16), "(places) where passage is prevented and no feet go" (v 17).[11] The next clearly identifiable event is Nabonidus's attack on the king of Dadanu in north Arabia before he moved on to Tayma. It remains a distinct possibility that a brief account of the campaign through Edom was included at the end of column 4 or the beginning of column 5.

The *Harran Stele* (Gadd 1958: 56–65; Beaulieu 1989: inscription 13; Schaudig 2001: 486–99, text 3.1) mentions that after a rebellion in Babylon, Nabonidus fled to Tayma and other north Arabian cities where he hid for 10 years (col. i. 22–26). The stele was written after he had returned from his stay in Arabia and rebuilt the temple of Sîn in Harran, the Ehulhul, near the end of his reign. While this inscription gives no information on his route to Arabia or the obstacles that he faced on the journey, it is important for determining the chronology of his reign. According to line 26, Nabonidus stayed in Arabia for 10 years.

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[10] N stem verb from Aramaic *rq* "to flee"—see Schaudig 2001: VII.2.5.a.

[11] Edom is a land of dramatic topographic contrasts, with the highest mountain in the southern Levant (Jabal Mubarak at 1727 m above sea level) being in close proximity to the lowest point in the region (the Southern Ghors at 396 m below sea level). For the topography of Edom, see Macumber 2001.

i 22   . . .   *u ana-ku*
23. *ul-tu* uru-*ia* tin.tir^ki *ú-še-ri-qa-an-ni-ma*
24.   *ú-ru-uh* uru *te-ma-a* uru *da-da-⟨nu⟩* uru *pa-dak-ku*
25. uru *hi-ib-ra-a* uru *iá-di-hu u a-di* uru *iá-at-ri-bu*
26. 10 mu.an.na^meš [*at-tal-la-ku*] *qé-reb-šú-un a-na*
27. uru-*ia* [tin.tir^ki *la*] *e-ru-ub*

He (Sîn) caused me to flee from my city Babylon, and (I traveled) on the path (to) Tayma, Dadanu, Padakku, Hibra, Yadihu, as far as Yatribu. For 10 years I traveled back and forth between them, and I did not enter my city Babylon.

The *Verse Account of Nabonidus* (Schaudig 2001: 563–78; text P1) is an overtly propagandistic text that describes the reign of Nabonidus negatively, while the actions of Cyrus, the Persian king who defeated him, are positively presented (Lee 1994). Although the narrative mentions little about the western campaign of Nabonidus, it does place his departure from Babylon and the start of the co-regency of his son at the beginning of his third year.

ii. 17b . . . *šá-lul-ti* mu *ina k*[*a*]-*šá-d*[*u*]
18. *ka-ra-áš ip-ta-qid ana reš-tu-ú bu-kur-šú*
19. ^lú*érin-ni ma-ti-tam ú-ta-'r-ir* ki-*šú*
20. *ip-ta-ṭa-ar* šu^min-*su ip-ta-qid-su* lugal-*tú*
21. *ù šu-ú né-su-ti iṣ-ṣa-bat har-ra-n*[*u*]
22. *e-mu-qu* ^kururi^ki *te-bu-ú it-ti-š*[*ú*]
23. *ana* ^uru*te-ma-a' qé-reb a-mur-ri-i iš-ta-kan* igi-*š*[*ú*]

At the beginning of the third year, (Nabonidus) entrusted the military camp to his firstborn son. He placed the army of all of the lands under his command. He loosened his hands and entrusted kingship to him, and he took the path to far away places. The forces of Akkad rose up with him, he set out towards the city of Tayma, within Amurru.

The available data from the Babylonian literary texts places the beginning of the campaign of Nabonidus to Tayma in his third year, or 553 B.C.E. (*Verse Account* ii 17 23), when he fought against Ammanānu (*Royal Chronicle* iv 26). On the basis of the *Royal Chronicle*, the year in the *Nabonidus Chronicle* for his attack on Ammanānu can be reconstructed. None of the accounts state when Nabonidus arrived in Tayma, although the *Harran Stele* does provide the length of his stay in Arabia as 10 years (i. 22–26;

ii. 10–14). Beaulieu (1989: 153–58) refers to three archival texts in an attempt to limit the range of dates that Nabonidus was in Arabia. GCCI 1: 294 records a sale by a man who was sent to Tayma during the fifth year of Nabonidus, although it is not certain that he was in residence there at that time. YOS 6: 134 refers to the transport of the "king's provisions" to Tayma in his 10th year, so Nabonidus was certainly ruling from there by that time. The most significant text in this regard, however, is GCCI 1: 405. This tablet records the delivery of provisions to Nabonidus in Tayma during his fifth year.[12] So it is certain that at some time during the fifth year of the reign of Nabonidus, he took up residency in Tayma.

With all of these data, Nabonidus's absence from Babylon can be limited to a period of 10 years between the beginning of his campaign (year 3 or 553 B.C.E.) and the middle of his 16th year (Beaulieu 1989: 154; cf. Tadmor 1965; Lambert 1972). Beaulieu (1989: 154–63) refers to several letters and prosopographical evidence to suggest that Nabonidus was back in Babylon by the middle of his 13th year, thereby further limiting the stay of Nabonidus in Tayma to between the years 553 and 543 B.C.E. These limited data are indirect and also inconclusive—none of the texts actually place Nabonidus in Babylon in his 13th year. With the discovery and publication of several lines from the as-Silaᶜ inscription in southern Jordan, it is necessary to reevaluate both the year of Nabonidus's campaign through Edom and his residency in Tayma.

THE AS-SILAᶜ
RELIEF OF NABONIDUS

The significant discovery of the as-Silaᶜ relief can provide further clarity to the chronology of Nabonidus's Arabian campaign and the decline of Edom. The relief is located near the village of Silaᶜ approximately 10 km southwest of Tafileh and 3 km northwest of the Edomite settlement of Busayra (fig. 1). It was first studied by F. Zayadine during a 1994 expedition (Zayadine 1999). Zayadine published his study of the historical context of the relief in 1999. However, he did not attempt any readings of the cuneiform inscription that accompanied the relief. In 1996 the relief was studied again by Goguel, who subsequently published it with Assyriologist

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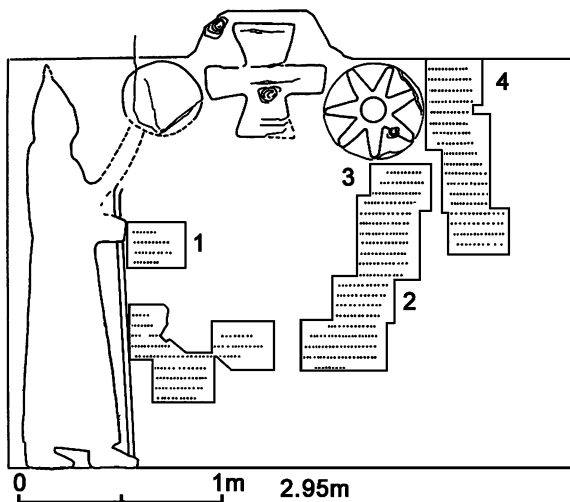[12] I thank Paul-Alain Beaulieu for sending me his collation of this important text.

Fig. 2. Drawing of the as-Sila‘ relief, with inscribed areas mentioned in the text. Adapted from Dalley and Goguel 1997: fig. 8.

Stephanie Dalley, who studied the inscription and historical context (Dalley and Goguel 1997). The relief was later visited by Raz, Raz, and Uchitel (2001) and Gentili and Saporetti (2001); both articles published portions of the inscription.

The relief was carved about midway up a 150-m-high sandstone cliff in a shallow recess (10–20 cm deep) that measures 2.95 m wide and between 2.00 and 2.20 m high (fig. 2). The most identifiable characteristic of the relief is the standing figure of a king facing right toward three divine symbols. The royal figure holds a long staff in one hand with the other hand raised up toward the first divine symbol. Known royal images of Assyrian kings usually hold short maces, whereas most images of Nebuchadnezzar II hold neither staff nor mace (Dalley and Goguel 1997: 173). The as-Sila‘ figure also wears a conical crown, unlike the Assyrian flat-topped crown. The closest comparisons to this figure include the top of two stelae from Harran (H2.A and H2.B; see Gadd 1958: 39–43, pls. 2a, 2b), the *Tayma Stele* from the fifth century B.C.E. (A.O. 1050; see Gadd 1958: pl. 3b), and a stele probably of Nabonidus found in Babylon (BM 90837; see Gadd 1958: pl. 3a).[13] Also unlike Assyrian royal images which face five or more

divine symbols, the as-Sila‘ figure faces only three. The symbol closest to the king is a moon disk (Sîn); a winged sun disk (Šamaš) is in the center, and a seven-pointed star (Ištar) is farthest from the king (Dalley and Goguel 1997:172; Schaudig 2001: 35–36). These three symbols are also paralleled on the sculptured stelae mentioned above. Notably, two of the three divine names are also extant in the as-Sila‘ inscription. Stephanie Dalley (Dalley and Goguel 1997: 172–75) studied the photos and drawings of the relief. On the basis of the image of the king, his accoutrements, and the three divine symbols, she identified the figure as Nabonidus. She also provided a brief overview of the historical context and concluded that the relief was probably engraved on the occasion of the subjugation of Edom en route to Tayma.

The first publications of the as-Sila‘ relief by Dalley and Goguel (1997) and Zayadine (1999) did not attempt any readings of the accompanying inscription. Dalley (Dalley and Goguel 1997: 173) did identify a few cuneiform signs in Neo-Babylonian script, like KI and LÚ or LUGAL. Schaudig was the first to publish consecutive signs that could yield a reading. The reading was of one partial line that included the name of the king, thus confirming that the relief was inscribed during the reign of Nabonidus. The partial line, reconstructed by Schaudig (2001: 544, no. 3.9), reads: "I am Nabonidus, king of Babylon . . ." ([ana?-ku?] Idmuati-[i] [lu]gal e[ki . . .]). Schaudig further estimated that the entire inscription was approximately 35 lines long (Schaudig 2001: 544). Until recently, only the 16 squeezes, partially published as photos in Dalley and Goguel (squeezes 9–16 = Dalley and Goguel 1997: figs. 9–11) were available for scholars to study the inscription.

Those who studied the as-Sila‘ inscription generally have followed the chronology of the reign of Nabonidus known from the *Nabonidus Chronicle*, within which little concrete information is available between years 3 and 13 of his reign, and dated his invasion of Edom to the beginning of this 10-year period. Dalley (Dalley and Goguel 1997: 174) tentatively suggested that Nabonidus defeated Edom in year 3 or 4 (553 or 552 B.C.E.) of his reign. Zayadine (1999: 90) placed his campaign in the year 552 B.C.E., or year 4 of his reign, and Schaudig (2001: 544, and cf. p. 48) leaves the date open to the period between years 3 and 13.

Over two millennia of weathering have badly eroded almost the entire inscription. Fortunately,
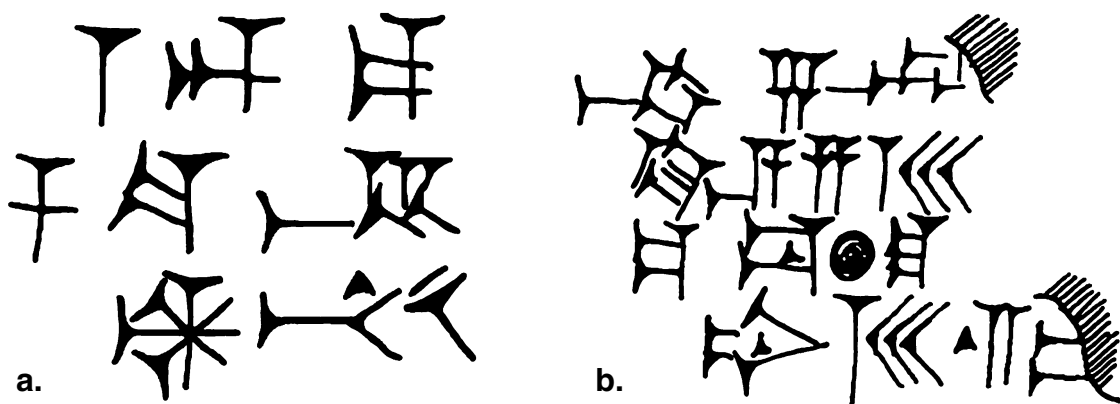
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[13] A stele with similar iconography was discovered recently at Tayma (TA 488). I thank Hanspeter Schaudig for sending me a copy of the stele, which is now published. See Eichmann, Schaudig, and Hausleiter 2006: 169–74.

Fig. 3. (a) Cuneiform inscription from lines 1–3. Adapted from Gentili and Saporetti 2001: fig. 3. (b) Cuneiform inscription from lines 21′–24′. Adapted from Gentili and Saporetti 2001: fig. 2.

Gentili and Saporetti (2001) published autograph copies of the identifiable signs and traces of the as-Silaᶜ inscription based on an inspection of the relief in 2000 (fig. 3). Although the length of the inscription is uncertain, I will refer to approximate line numbers of the inscription and correlate them with the hand copies published in Gentili and Saporetti (2001: figs. 2, 3) and, where available, the squeezes published by Dalley and Goguel (1997: figs. 8–11). The inscription begins at the right side of the star symbol, where approximately 10 lines are discernible, although only a few signs remain. The text then continues beneath the three divine symbols to the right of the figure of Nabonidus. The first area published by Gentili and Saporetti (Area 1; 2001: fig. 2) is from the beginnings of several lines of the end of the inscription, approximately lines 17′–26′ (squeezes 1–4 in Dalley and Goguel 1997: fig. 8). The second and third areas together (Gentili and Saporetti's Areas 2 and 3; 2001: figs. 2, 3) cover the entire height of the center of the inscription; Area 2 consists of signs from the lines in the lower portion of the column (approximately lines 21′–26′), and Area 3 has traces of a few signs at the top of the center portion of lines 11′–20′, directly beneath the star symbol. The beginnings of the first seven lines of the inscription are found in Area 4 (Gentili and Saporetti 2001: fig. 3) to the right of the star symbol. Most of the lines consist of only one or two extant signs that in isolation yield no sensible readings. Yet there are two important readings that add to our understanding of this inscription.

The reading of the beginning of the inscription confirms Dalley's argument that the as-Silaᶜ relief was engraved during the campaign of Nabonidus to Arabia. This section was published as a hand copy by Gentili and Saporetti in their Area 4 (2001: fig. 3) and as squeeze 16 by Dalley and Goguel (1997: fig. 11). Raz, Raz, and Uchitel (2001: 35) also published a hand copy of just the first line. Only the beginnings of the first three lines are extant in this area, with traces of at least three signs in another three lines.

1   *ana*-[*ku*] ᵐᵈmuati-[*i*] lugal e[ᵏⁱ] x x x
2   [x x]ᵈutu en [gal-*ú* x x
3   [x x] ᵈe[n.zu] x x x

1   I am Nabû-na'id, king of Babylon
2   [. . .] Šamaš the [great] lord . . .
3   [. . .] Sîn [. . .]

While the spelling of the king's name (ᵈmuati-*i*) is not the most common spelling within his inscriptions, it is attested in the two major Harran inscriptions: the *Adad-guppi Stele* (Harran H 1 i 7; ii 7, 35, 45; ii 24′) and the *Harran Inscription of Nabonidus* (H 2 i 24′). The two gods mentioned in this section are common in the texts from this period. Both Šamaš and Sîn continued to be significant deities in Arabia well after the collapse of the Neo-Babylonian empire. Šamaš, symbolized in the relief by the winged sun disk, was known as Ṣalmu in northwest Arabia in later times (Dalley 1985; 1986). Sîn, represented by the crescent moon symbol, was the most important god for Nabonidus. Temples dedicated to him and inscriptions mentioning him have been found even in southern Arabia (Frantsouzoff 2001). In this inscription, Šamaš (ᵈutu) is followed by en (*bēlu*). The most common appellative for Šamaš in the inscriptions of Nabonidus is

bēlu rabû (either as en *ra-bu-ú* or en gal-*ú*), the "great lord," and that is the probable reconstruction in the as-Silaʿ relief, although no traces of the sign following en remain.

The second important reading on the as-Silaʿ relief is at the beginning of several lines farther down the inscription, approximately lines 21′–24′. This section, as fragmentary as it is, has implications for the chronology of the fall of Edom and the western campaign of Nabonidus. It is published as a hand copy by Gentili and Saporetti (Area 4; 2001: fig. 2). Unfortunately, the squeezes of this section were never published, but it covers the area of Dalley and Goguel's squeezes 1–4 (see 1997: fig. 8). After approximately four lines with partially preserved signs, a year of the reign of the king is given. The following section of the inscription yields individual signs that suggest the language of a military campaign.

21′ mu.5.k[ám . . .]
22′ érin?]ʰⁱ·ᵃ [. . .]
23′ . . .] ká.gal [. . .]
24′ . . .] lú.meš [. . .]

21′ Year 5 [. . .
22′ the troop]s [. . .
23′ . . .] the gate of [. . .
24′ . . .] the men [. . .

The beginning of the year-date in line 21′ is clear, although that is all that remains of this line. Gentili and Saporetti (2001: 42) read the third sign in line 21′ as LUGAL. However, MU followed by a year number is never followed by LUGAL in Assyrian or Babylonian inscriptions; it is typically followed by KÁM. Since only the beginning of the sign is extant on their rendition of the inscription and those traces are similar to the KÁM sign, it is preferable to read the very common formula of mu.5.kám in this line. Likewise, it is important to note that without the end of the line, or the context, it is possible that the year is not referring to the attack on Edom but to some other event that occurred prior to that part of the campaign. The fifth year of Nabonidus (or 551 B.C.E.), however, can now be seen as a *terminus a quo* for the attack on Edom. This dating of the attack on Edom remains only probable, since the fragmentary nature of the inscription does not allow us to determine any details about what happened in the fifth year.

The events of the fifth year of the reign of Nabonidus are virtually unknown. By the end of his fifth year, Nabonidus was residing in Tayma, yet with the publication of this line by Gentili and Saporetti it now appears that Nabonidus was still in the midst of his campaign to Arabia during at least the first part of his fifth year. The reconstruction of érin (*ummānu*, "troops") is a strong possibility for the beginning of line 22′. The plural determinative ḫi.a is clear in the autograph copy, and within military contexts in the epigraphic material from the reign of Nabonidus, this is one of the most common terms pluralized with ḫi.a. Unfortunately, the center portion of the inscription is badly eroded, and only a few signs remain. For example, in Gentili and Saporetti's Area 2 (2001: fig. 2), approximately line 21′, traces of a LUGAL are still visible.

POSSIBLE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CORRELATES OF THE CAMPAIGN OF NABONIDUS

During the Iron Age, most Edomite sites were small, unfortified agricultural villages that were abandoned when the Edomite polity began to decline in the mid-sixth century B.C.E. As discussed above, Nabonidus has long been considered the culprit of instigating Edom's decline. A number of scholars have also noted that destruction levels at Busayra, Tawilan, and Tall al-Khalayfi occurred in the middle of the sixth century B.C.E., although occupation at these sites continued into the Persian period (Zayadine 1999: 88–89; Dalley and Goguel 1997: 175; Bartlett 1989: 158–59). Yet these scholars also point out that direct, clear links between the campaign of Nabonidus through Edom and these destructions are lacking. While the complete as-Silaʿ inscription could have narrated his campaign through Edom, historical details connecting Nabonidus with an attack on any Edomite city do not exist. Furthermore, the destructions at Busayra, Tawilan, and Tall al-Khalayfi could have been the result of unintentional fires, local uprisings, or a number of other explanations.

Bienkowski (2002: 477–78) makes a strong argument that, of the three sites that some connect with Nabonidus, Busayra was attacked during this campaign. Busayra was the largest Edomite village (at around 8.16 ha), and it was the only fortified site, situated on a spur surrounded by deep ravines on three sides. Busayra was established in the late eighth century B.C.E. and flourished throughout the seventh and

first half of the sixth centuries B.C.E. (Bienkowski's "Integrated Stage 2"; 2002: 475–77). During this period, two large public buildings were constructed: a temple in Area A and a palace in Area C. The destructions at the end of Stage 2, in the mid-sixth century B.C.E., were in the courtyard and cella of the Area A temple and in the reception room and bathroom of the Area C palace (Bienkowski 2002: 475; 2001c: 202–5). Both of the buildings were subsequently rebuilt and used into the Persian period. The village wall and domestic areas were not destroyed at this time; instead the attackers focused on the two buildings that were symbolically important for the ruling Edomite elite (Bienkowski 2001c; 2002: 478).

Farther to the south, in the Petra region of southern Jordan, the 2.45-ha unfortified agricultural village of Tawilan was also partially destroyed around this time, although it is less certain that Nabonidus was responsible. There is evidence of destructions and fire in the three excavated areas, but it is not clear if they were contemporaneous destructions or even if they were deliberate (Bennett and Bienkowski 1995: 105). The site was eventually abandoned, although a cuneiform tablet was found in the fill. The tablet was written in Harran during the first year of "King Darius," probably Darius II, around 423 B.C.E. (Dalley 1995: 67). While Busayra and Tawilan were partially destroyed or abandoned in the middle of the sixth century B.C.E., limited occupation of these sites, and Tall al Khalayfi, continued in the Persian period (Bienkowski 2001a; Knauf 1990: 205).

The southernmost site occasionally associated with Nabonidus is Tall al-Khalayfi. Tall al-Khalayfi, a .48-ha fortified site about 100 m north of the Gulf of Aqaba, was first excavated by Nelson Glueck (1938a; 1938b; 1939; 1940; 1970: 106–7). Analysis of this site is difficult, and Glueck's conclusions and stratigraphy have been reevaluated by Pratico (1985; 1993). Recently, Naʾaman (2001) has suggested that Tall al-Khalayfi was not ever an Edomite site, but that it was an Assyrian "emporium" founded in the late eighth century B.C.E. According to Pratico's conclusion (1993), the site was constructed and in use between the eighth and early sixth centuries B.C.E. There were rebuilds and expansions of the site, but destruction levels have not been clearly identified. Some occupation of Tall al-Khalayfi certainly continued into the fifth and possibly fourth century B.C.E., as both pottery and ostraca indicate. Regardless of the lack of a clear destruction level in the mid-sixth century B.C.E., there would be no rea-

son to link Nabonidus with the end of the site. While Nabonidus could have been responsible for the destruction of the temple and palace at Busayra, it is unlikely that he was ever involved in Tawilan or Tall al-Khalayfi.

A POSSIBLE RECONSTRUCTION
OF THE END OF EDOM

Nabonidus traveled south on the King's Highway from the region of Syria during his third (553 B.C.E.) and fourth (552 B.C.E.) years. In his fifth year (551 B.C.E.), he and his troops reached the mountainous terrain of Edom. This was the polity that controlled the southernmost section of the trade routes from south Arabia, which bisected in its territory north to the other Transjordanian polities and Syria and west to the Negev and the Mediterranean Sea. For Nabonidus to control the lucrative trade routes coming out of southern Arabia, it was necessary for him to subjugate Edom and either establish his own proxy ruler there or force the Edomite elite to support his policies. He attacked the central village of Busayra and destroyed its only two public buildings—the temple and the small palace. Perhaps the Edomite rulers and their kin fled to the mountaintop settlement of as-Silaʿ where Nabonidus and his troops pursued them.[14] After they submitted or were defeated, Nabonidus had the as-Silaʿ relief engraved to commemorate his victory and reinforce his position of power to the local population. He continued southeast to Dadanu and then on to Tayma where he began to rule in this fifth year (551 B.C.E.). Having lost their primary means of profit, some of the remaining Edomite elite went to the west, to the cities of the Negev, where they could continue to gain from the trade routes, a process underway even during the seventh and early sixth centuries B.C.E. (Bartlett 1999). Some of the elite may have remained and continued to exercise some level of control under submission to Nabonidus. The many small villages and agricultural sites in Edom that were constructed during the

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[14] Glueck (1935: 100, 113) initially visited the site during his surveys of the region. Numerous archaeologists have visited and excavated portions of the site (see MacDonald et al. 2004: 276 for literature). The site receives considerable attention in secondary literature because many associate it with biblical Sela/Joktheel where Amaziah defeated and killed 10,000 Edomites (2 Chr 25:11–12; 2 Kgs 14:7). For this identification, see Lemaire 2003; Hart 1986.

Assyrian period were gradually abandoned after the "thin-veneer" of the state had been removed.

CONCLUSION

Those who attempt to study the history of Edom are faced with sets of data that rarely allow for precise dating. Bartlett's (1972: 37) admission that "(w)e cannot pretend that we are well informed about the decline of the Edomite kingdom" still holds true. Until the discovery of the as-Silaʿ relief and the publication of the few remaining signs from its inscription, a range of dates between 553 and about 550 B.C.E. was possible for the campaign of Nabonidus through Edom. This attack can now be relatively securely dated to 551 B.C.E., the fifth year of Nabonidus. Nabonidus is most likely responsible for the partial destruction of the Area A temple and Area C palace at Busayra. He then continued on his campaign to Dadanu in northwest Arabia and finally to Tayma where he ruled for the next 10 years. Although it is still unclear what happened in Edom in the years immediately following the campaign of Nabonidus, this attack was the beginning of the end for the Iron Age polity in Edom.

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