

My first official blog post! I hope it piques your interest.

Very interesting archaeological finds are emerging in southern Jordan in the area of the ancient nation of Edom (also called Seir), a nation and people referred to often in the Old Testament. Anthropologist and archaeologist Dr. Thomas Levy is leading a dig at an archaeological site called Khirbet en-Nahas (Arabic for “**ruins of copper**”) which has revealed ancient copper mines dating from the time of Solomon. The popular media buzz over this story has creatively labeled this site as "Solomon's mines", but there is no direct evidence to associate it with Solomon. Its value largely lies in proving that Edom indeed existed that early and, apparently, had a booming mining and trade industry (in precious metals). Nonetheless, if the copper mines are as old as Dr. Levy believes them to be it would most likely be technically correct to say that they belonged to Solomon, as well as David, when they ruled over Edom during the Israelite monarchy period.

Below is an informative video survey of what is going on at the excavation at Khirbet en-Nahas with Dr. Thomas Levy from the University of California in San Diego. It will give you a better idea of what is taking place at the site, although these excavations have been going on for years. More recently though the claim for the early date of the mines has become more solidified with releases of publications from Thomas Levy *et al* about the site with radio carbon dating information to support his claims.

(Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtsTV0LwwMo&eurl>)

Paper publications by Thomas Levy and others working on the site can be found here: [Reasse
ssing the chronology of Biblical Edom: new excavations and 14C dates from Khirbat en-Nahas
\(Jordan\)](#)

Also see Dr. Levy's response to a critical evaluation of that above publication: [How many fortresses do you need to write a preliminary report?](#)

. Both papers contain more pictures from the dig.

Those documents were obtained from [this page](#) from the Wadi Arabah Project website in the context of a debate and critical evaluation of the current discoveries at Khirbet en-Nahas and the responses from Levy *et al* . The page and discussions also contain valuable radio carbon dating information. One thing is for sure, though they may squabble over dating +/- 100 years (or less): this is a very early mine,

10th century B.C.E

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at least

. Levy's defense in his "

How many fortresses do you need to write a preliminary report?

" is terrific in identifying and bringing to light the chronological bias concerning Edom that many scholars have held since rejecting Nelson Glueck's claims about the early dating of sites in Edom. The chronological bias also betrays a long-standing general mistrust of biblical, historical accounts by scholars who rather tend to believe that many details in the Bible were fabricated or were anachronistic concerning the early existence, and especially the *size*

and prosperity/power, of nations described in the Bible.

However this type of objection has been seen before, which has since been vindicated in favor of the Bible's account, in the form of scholars once doubting the existence and expansiveness of the Hittite nation. Before the early twentieth century no one believed that the Hittites were a real people since no evidence outside of the Bible had been discovered to document their existence. But ever since those monumental discoveries of thousands of Hittite cuneiform tablets in Boghazkoy, Turkey (ancient Hattusas - the capital of the Hittite empire) by Hugo Winckler and Theodore Makridi Bey in 1906, and their subsequent decipherment by Bedrich Hrozný, the existence and power of the ancient Hittite empire has been acknowledged by everyone. I tend to believe that Edom, similarly, is much more ancient than some skeptical scholars and archaeologists (like Israel Finkelstein) believe or allow for and that it was indeed as active and big as the Old Testament records, dating from the time of the Davidic monarchy (and even earlier during the time of Moses). **Update:** I have also written [a paper](#) which defends the antiquity of the Transjordanian nations mentioned in the Old Testament, in the context of Egypt's interactions with them in the New Kingdom period.

Establishing an earlier chronology for Edom may also allow us to better understand the historical context of interplay between Egypt, Edom, and Israel such as is recorded in the account in 1 Kings chapter 11 about "*Hadad the Edomite*" (**11:14**) who fled to Egypt during a time of war with Israel (during David's reign) and found favor with the Pharaoh at the time who "*gave to him in marriage the sister of his own wife, the sister of Tahpenes the queen*

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(11:19)

. With such specific references it should be relatively easy to pinpoint the exact historical time period in which this event would have taken place given the further discovery of names and events dating to the 10th century B.C.E. Kenneth Kitchen suggests that given a 20 year period for the entire story of Hadad dwelling in Egypt that he would have most likely lived in Egypt during the reigns of Pharaohs Amenemope, Osochor, and Siamun

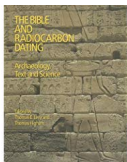
[\[a\]](#)

. He also points out some internal earmarks of the story that support the likelihood of its historical veracity when compared to practices in Egypt at the time. We need more information about this period however to draw direct parallels (such as if the queen Tahpenes' name was found recorded in an inscription) for exact dating.

Returning to the current excavations in Edom, the published report that Levy refers to in his "*Re assessing the chronology*

" paper above, which was still on the way to the press at the time of that publication, is now out and is available on Amazon here:

[The Bible and Radiocarbon Dating: Archaeology, Text and Science](#)



In addition to all that, Thomas Levy has an active website for the excavation at Khirbet en-Nahas here: [Archaeology in the Levant](#) , and it has more links and resources on the dig than you could probably read in a couple of hours. A neat tidbit is that the CALIT2 advanced imaging that they are using is surpassing the past sophistication of scientific technology that has typically been applied to traditional dig sites, so he is making use of UCSDs most cutting-edge technology and resources to aid his dig. Interesting stuff, check it out.

Update: A 2009 Oriental Institute seminar at the University of Chicago took place not too long ago and Thomas Levy presented a special topic on Iron Age metal production in Edom in chapter 9 (pg. 147) of this publication: [Nomads, Tribes, and the State in the Ancient Near East](#)

Associated links for further reading:

1. [King Solomon's \(Copper\) Mines?](#) (Original UCSD News)
2. [Archaeologist unearths biblical controversy](#) (Canadian The Globe and Mail) [original page [here](#)]
3. [Carbon dating backs the Bible on Edom](#) (Nice overview and biblical tie-in - on Dr. Russell Adams' blog)
4. [Khirbet en-Nahas](#)

Cool stuff:

"Khirbat en-Nahas, comprising some 100 ancient buildings including a fortress, is situated in the midst of a large area covered by black slag – more than 24 acres that you can clearly see on Google Earth's satellite imagery ." (source: link 1)