Single-layer multi-periods? A Case Study of the Enclosure Site of Khirbet el Mastarah, Jordan Valley

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Dating of desert enclosure sites is challenging, as they have minimal diagnostic elements. Moreover, these sites are composed primarily of a single layer, which raises the question of whether they are of single or multi-period settlements.

The current research aims to answer this question by assessing a group of enclosures in the Jordan Valley. The sites were previously surveyed and dated to the early Iron Age (ca. 1200–1000 BCE), and linked to tribes of Israelite settlement in the region. We present new excavations and OSL ages from Khirbet el Mastarah that indicate several periods of usage, and the possible construction and occupation of the enclosures during the following periods:

Iron Age II (2570±220 yr), Late Hellenistic or Early Roman periods (2090±150 yr and 2120±160 yr), Late Byzantine (1410±200 yr, 1370±150 yr), Early Islamic and Islamic/Abassid periods (1000±90 yr and 1080±110 yr). Another indication that emerges from the results is that different enclosures were used at various locations during various periods, and are still used by local herders. Therefore, the site has horizontal chronology rather than vertical stratigraphy, and is characterized by a single-layer with multi periods of spatial usage.