

Someone put the intercom phone on my head and I heard the voice of the chief pilot asking me if I had any particular wishes about what I might want to see on the way south to Eilat, mindful of the fact that he did not want to stray over the border line between Israel and Jordan that bisects the line of the north-south rift of the Wadi Arabah, a rift that is part of a much larger one extending from Turkey to Africa. I told him I would like to be flown over Timna (Mene'iyeh), where years earlier I had found pottery enabling me to date it and other sites like it to the period extending especially from the 10th to the 6th centuries B.C., and to give to this place and others like it where copper was mined and smelted the name of "King Solomon's Copper Mines." I still adhere to those dates, and indeed have been able to substantiate them through recent studies of pottery from the copper mining and smelting sites of Timna and Khirbet Amrani and from excavations of Ezion-geber: Elath in approximately the center of the north shore of the Gulf of Aqabah.

The flight over the west side of the Wadi Arabah brought back many memories to me. The entire flight from Kalundia to modern Eilat took a little over an hour. Over thirty years ago, together with a group of about ten Injadat Arabs from the Wadi Arabah and two English and American companions, I had embarked on a camel trip of archaeological exploration of the entire Wadi Arabah, that took us almost two weeks. We crisscrossed its entire length, discovering anew or revisiting sites that had previously been discovered by Fritz Frank and others, but for the first time putting them into the framework of history by being able to date the potsherds strewn about on the surfaces of the fairly numerous mining and smelting sites we came across. At the end of that camel trip, we had arrived at Tell el-Kheleifeh, which I subsequently excavated and identified with Solomon's seaport of Ezion-geber. I looked for the small, sand covered ruins when our helicopter started to descend at Eilat, but we were too far to the west for me to make out exactly where they were. It is still unfortunately in no-man's land. I would love to undertake one or two more seasons of excavations there!