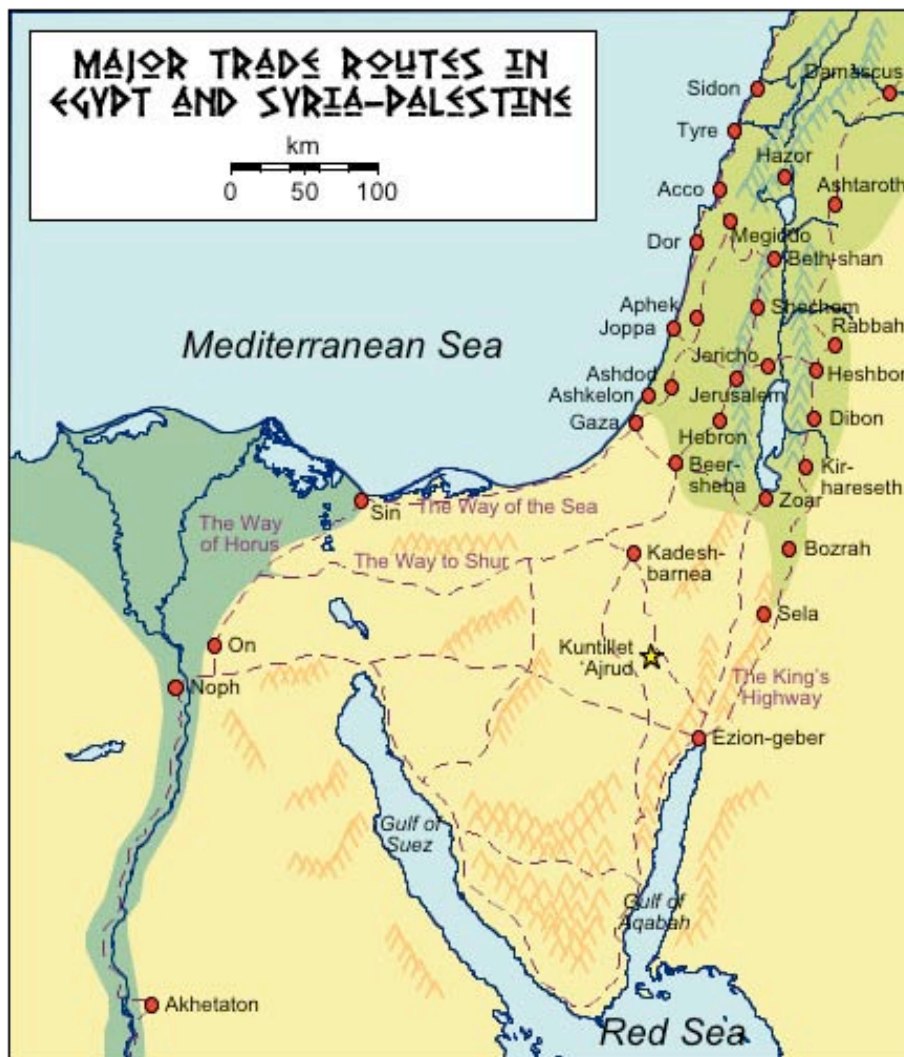


THE CARAVANSERAI AT KUNTILLET 'AJRUD

A biblical world site plan for Testament campaigns, provided by www.Codicil.info

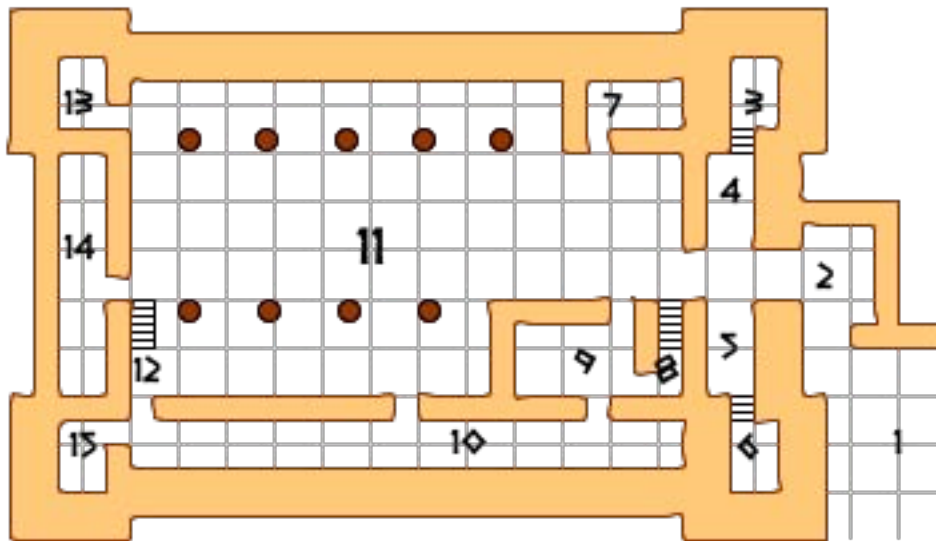
Travelers in the ancient Near East normally relied on the hospitality of others for overnight accommodations, but sometimes a day's journey (25–35 km) would end in “the middle of nowhere.” Although not necessarily common, caravanserais or waystations for travelers are attested both textually and archaeologically. Genesis 42:27 and 43:21 narrate events set at just such a “lodging place” (Hebrew *mālôn*), when Joseph's brothers stop on their way to Canaan from Egypt. Exodus 4:24 describes a mysterious encounter between God and Moses at this sort of caravanserai. In Jeremiah 9:1 (9:2 in English versions), the speaker (Jeremiah? God?) wishes for a lodging place in the desert so he could get away from treacherous Judeans.



The remains of what appears to have been one such caravanserai have been excavated at a site now called Kuntillet 'Ajrud in Arabic, or Chorvat Teman in Hebrew (see the “Trade Routes” map for its location). This was surely not a unique installation, as travelers would often have need of lodging far from major settlements. The following layout and description of a biblical-era caravanserai is based (sometimes quite loosely) on the finds at Kuntillet 'Ajrud.

GROUND LEVEL

The ground level plan shown here closely resembles the actual building remaining at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. The descriptions of the rooms and their contents/functions are partially based on the Kuntillet 'Ajrud excavations and partially on the author's imagination. The squares are 5' x 5'. The Kuntillet 'Ajrud installation opened toward the east, thus these maps would have north at the top, but the orientation of other caravanserais may have differed.



1. Entrance court. Entry to the building is gained through this entrance.

2. Entry hall. This sharp turn serves primarily as a “baffle” to slow entrance to the building, whether by raiders or dust storms. Guards could, perhaps, be posted here if desired.

3 and 6. Depositories or shrines. In

the actual building at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, these small rooms had no means of access except small holes in the walls above the benches in rooms 4 and 5. In a *Testament* game, these rooms might be used as shrines where travelers might worship, or they could serve as depositories where travelers might leave offerings (in the form of votive statues, that is, figurines dedicated to the gods they depicted) to thank their gods for safe travels. Note that the shrines could be generic, featuring a small raised platform where travelers could place their own teraphs for ritual use, or they could feature permanently installed idols. The two shrines would not necessarily have to be dedicated to the same deity in a place like this. The short flights of stairs indicate that rooms 3 and 6, if used for religious purposes, might sit at a slightly higher level than the rest of the ground floor.

4 and 5. The bench room. At Kuntillet 'Ajrud, this long room was lined on both sides with benches. The exact purposes of these benches is unknown. They might have been used as seats for travelers conducting business at the caravanserai, or for its guards (if any). Similar benches in religious contexts were used as locations to deposit votive figurines. At Kuntillet 'Ajrud, pieces of storage jars and inscribed wall fragments were discovered in the bench room. These inscribed fragments included brief prayers, blessings, and/or dedications to or in the name of several deities, including Yahweh, Baal, and Asherah. One inscription even mentioned “Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah,” implying that the author of this inscription thought of Asherah as Yahweh's consort. A drawing of a sacred tree flanked by ibexes and a lion seems to point to Asherah, and drawings of a bull-headed god have been interpreted as images of the Egyptian god Bes. Clearly, the clientele of Kuntillet 'Ajrud was religiously eclectic.

7 and 9. Small rooms. The function of these rooms at Kuntillet 'Ajrud is uncertain. They may have served merely as storage rooms. In a *Testament* game, they might be given a more interesting function. One might be a bathing chamber, for example.

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8 and 12. Stairs to the second floor. The upper floor, or roof, was not preserved at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. The stairs, however, survived, indicating the presence of the upper floor or roof.

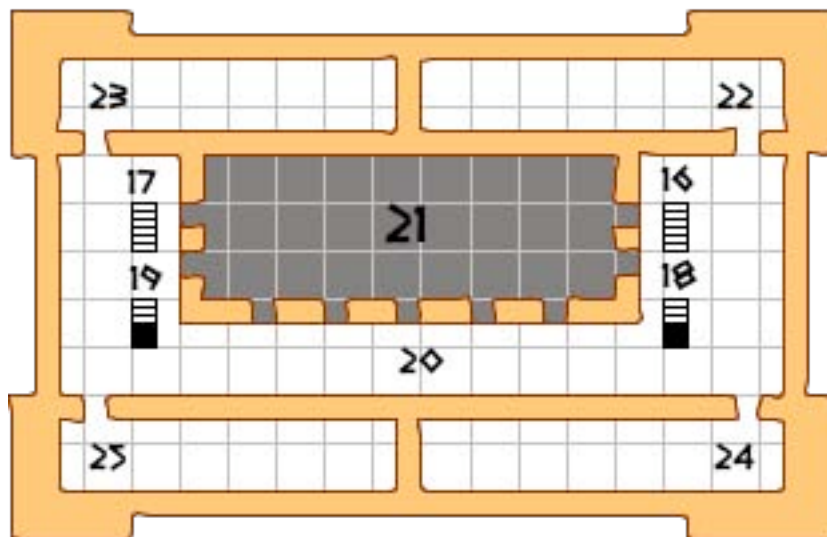
10 and 14. Southern and western storerooms. These storerooms would house large earthenware jars containing various foodstuffs and other needs for travelers. The jars might hold water, wine, oil, flax, or various sorts of grain.

11. Inner courtyard. Travelers would lodge their animals here for the night. A busy caravanserai might perhaps feature wooden stalls or posts for securing the animals and keeping them separate from those of other travelers. At Kuntillet 'Ajrud, one or more ovens was located in the southwestern corner of the courtyard. The brown circles represent wooden posts helping to support the second floor.

13 and 15. Corner storerooms. These rooms appear to have been used for storage of pottery and stone. Since the oven was apparently located in the southwestern corner of the inner courtyard (room 11), room 15 might serve as a storage place for cooking vessels and utensils. Room 13 might be a kind of workshop and storage space for maintaining and repairing the building.

UPPER FLOOR

In the ruins at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, a pair of staircases testifies to the existence of an upper floor. Nothing of that floor has survived the passage of time, however, so the map and description given here of the upper floor and roof are purely imaginary.



16 and 17. Stairs up to roof.

18 and 19. Stairs down to ground level.

20. Corridor and "observation deck." This large area simply links the rooms on the second floor and allows for occupants to look down on the court below.

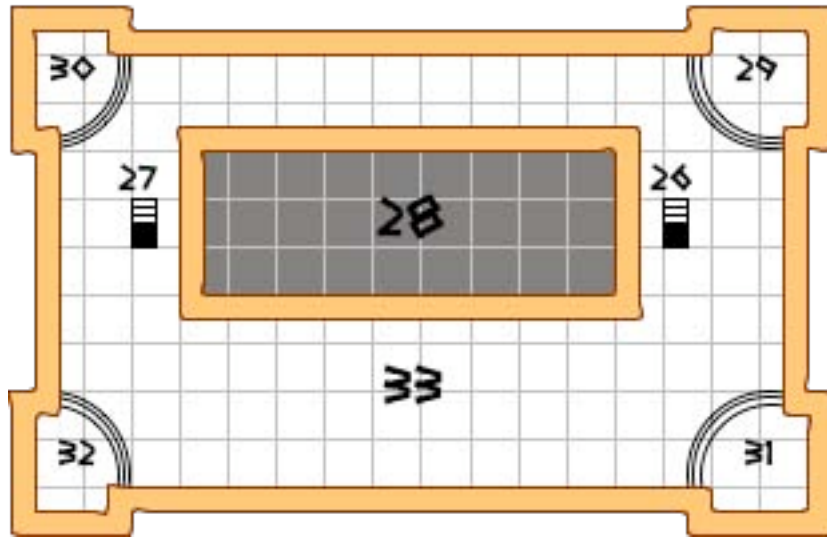
21. Open-air area. The gray space represents an area open to the level below. The small gray squares represent win-

dows through which individuals on the upper floor could look down and observe the goings-on in the inner courtyard of the first floor.

22 through 25. Sleeping rooms. In standard Iron Age houses, animals were kept on the first floor and the family slept on the upper floor. Caravanserais could perhaps be modeled after large houses, with sleeping quarters on the second floor. The walls provide some degree of privacy and security.

ROOF

As with the second floor, this roof layout is purely imaginary, except insofar as it conforms to the outer dimensions of the ruins at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. Note that the "walls" on this level would be low walls, perhaps waist high at most.



26-27. Stairs down to second floor.

28. Open area. The gray area represents space open to the inner courtyard on the first level.

29-31. "Guard towers."

There is no evidence for this at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, but since the layout resembles that of a rectangular fortress, perhaps the caravanserai's roof might feature slightly raised platforms in each corner. These raised platforms could potentially

be used as lookout towers or positions from which to defend the waystation using arrows and stones (whether thrown or slung).

33. Empty space. Or, perhaps, this area might be used for some sort of storage. If the corner areas are interpreted as potential guard emplacements, then some sort of weapons storage (e.g., for slingstones) might appear somewhere in this area.

ADDITIONAL BUILDINGS

A second building was unearthed at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, but it was so eroded that almost no details of its layout could be reconstructed. Other buildings such as storage silos or permanent housing for NPCs localized at the caravanserai could stand near the caravanserai building itself.

POSSIBLE NPC ENCOUNTERS

Hosteler. An installation such as this one would probably need a resident overseer to keep supplies stocked for the travelers. The hosteler would probably live in his own house very near the caravanserai. If statistics are needed for the hosteler, he should probably be a Commoner with several ranks in Profession (Inkeeper).

Guards. Depending on the level of state centralization and organization in the area where the caravanserai lies, the station might be guarded by soldiers assigned by the king, or by mercenaries hired by the hosteler. Of course, the caravanserai might not be guarded at all. The character levels of these Warriors should be determined by the GM based on the character of the caravanserai and the requirements of the scenario. They might be eager young recruits who pulled the least desirable assignment, grizzled old world-weary veterans put out to pasture, down-on-their-luck mer-

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cenaries happy for the room and board, or soldiers in their prime serving as lookouts and first-line defense against potential raids.

Religious functionaries. Since such caravanserais tended to be religiously eclectic, the PCs might encounter one or more NPCs who serve a rival god. A Qedeshah might try to entice PCs into participation in a fertility ritual, or she might simply try to supplement her income by posing as a common prostitute. A Cleric or Levite Priest—whether living nearby or passing through alone or with another group of travelers—might challenge the PCs' religious commitments.

Mysterious figures. A Desert Hermit encountered at such a caravanserai could perhaps serve as a source of useful information for the PCs about the local region or other NPCs encountered. A Prophet's oracle might provide the characters with impetus for a new adventure trajectory.

Spies. If the caravanserai is near a national border, spies from either side of the border might stop over at the caravanserai either for simple lodging or to gather information. The spies could be friendly to the PCs, citizens of the same kingdom, about to launch a reconnaissance into the bordering kingdom ... or they could be citizens of the bordering kingdom, conducting reconnaissance on the PC's home turf.

Other travelers. Naturally, the PCs are not the only ones traveling the broad spaces of the ancient Near East. The caravanserai provides a convenient place for PCs to encounter travelers, perhaps from remote parts of the ancient world, who can provide conflict, information, needed goods and services, or plot hooks—either intentionally, or as a result of the PCs' eavesdropping. The possibilities are vast.

Raiders. A group of marauding bandits might choose to attack the caravanserai while the PCs are in residence. Such raids might be aimed at gleaning new provisions for the raiders, or the raiders might be slavers intent on securing new "merchandise."

Refugee. This NPC has come to the wilderness fleeing someone or some circumstance. (See Jeremiah 9:1, for example.) If the NPC can enlist the PCs in his or her cause, a mission to thwart the refugee's oppressors. On the other hand, if the PCs don't seem too interested in helping the refugee, the pursuers might show up at the caravanserai themselves. Then again, there is always the possibility that the refugee would misrepresent his or her own plight, and the PCs might be drawn in on the wrong side of the conflict.

POSSIBLE PLOT HOOKS

Rest and recuperation. From time to time, PCs need a "safe" place to rest, heal, prepare items, use Craft skills, and so on. The caravanserai could provide such a place. The "down time" spent at a caravanserai could also provide a context for role-playing the relationships between the PCs.

Chance meeting. Although it a hackneyed device, the caravanserai ("inn") could be used as a place where the PCs first meet one another.

Chance discovery. Clay plots and plaster fragments at Kuntillet 'Ajrud contained brief texts, mostly blessings or thanksgivings devoted to various gods. PCs visiting a caravanserai might happen across some votive text, graffito, or papyrus roll that leads them off on a new adventure trajectory or plants a seed of conflict or information that will blossom later on in the campaign.

Mystery. A caravanserai might be the perfect setting for some sort of mysterious circumstance. Perhaps the PCs find the caravanserai deserted. Perhaps evidence of murder or theft (see Genesis

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42:26–28) has been planted on one of the PCs. Perhaps the caravanserai comes under attack by some supernatural force during the PCs' overnight stay (see Exodus 4:24–26). These and other plot devices could make the caravanserai the geographical focus of an entire session or more of gaming, if the GM can creatively contrive a reason for the PCs to stay at the caravanserai more than one night.