

THE BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF
JABAL AL LAWZ

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is concerned with exposing the Biblical significance of a mountain in the northwest corner of Saudi Arabia. The mountain is Jabal al Lawz and it is significant because it is the conclusion of this paper that it is the best candidate for the Biblical Mt. Sinai. There are over twenty sites that various scholars have identified as the sacred mountain, the most popular being Jebel Musa, at Saint Catherine's Monastery in the southern Sinai Peninsula. This study examines the testimony of ancient and modern scholars, maps, atlases and books, as well as the most recent archeological site surveys and excavations conducted at the mountain. This paper will include the observations of Western and Arab sources who have studied the site first hand.

Every attempt has been made to present both sides of the argument and present an objective viewpoint. The intention of this study is to present a comprehensive treatment of the topic, with some attention to detail. This will include the testimony of ancient historians and the latest scientific analysis of the site by archaeology and satellite imagery. Upon careful and objective consideration of the arguments presented in this dissertation, it is believed that the reader will acknowledge the Biblical significance of Jabal al Lawz, and conclude that it may be most convincing candidate for Mt. Sinai.

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INTRODUCTION

The Biblical significance of Jabal al Lawz [Mountain of Almonds in Saudi Arabia] will be demonstrated in this paper. It is significant because the mountain and its environs fit the description of the Scriptural Mt. Sinai and Horeb better than other candidates for the honor. It is believed that the reader, upon objective reflection on this work, will conclude that Jabal al Lawz is one of the best, if not the best candidate for the Mountain of Moses. This subject of study is not without passionate conflict. Differences of opinion have caused scholars and laymen alike to be completely unyielding in their views on the subject. At times, the “evidence” which supports some unyielding opinions is questionable.

This study will include arguments from both sides of the issue. This author has attempted to be comprehensive on the subject. This paper will include research on the historic location of Midian, supported by the testimony of ancient scholars, the Septuagint, pottery, Bible atlases, as well as the work of present day scholars and archaeologists. The Apostle Paul’s reference to Mt. Sinai being in “Arabia” is also addressed. Arguments that concern the viability of Jabal al Lawz itself as the foremost candidate for the Holy Mountain are presented.

Beside the testimony of the ancients and modern historians, geographers, and scholars, the latest conclusions are presented from a site survey and excavation conducted in the last several years. The host government of the site, Saudi Arabia, published this work under the title Al Bid: History and Archaeology in 2002. This is the only record in print of the attempt by the Department of Antiquities and Museums to publish a formal archaeological study of the site. There have been scholarly archaeological writings of

various sites in the area, but this is the first survey published by the Saudi government that addresses the key points of interest in this paper.

However, this is not the only source of information on the site. Several westerners have examined the site over the years with varying levels of diligence in recording their observations. One couple in particular has visited the site fourteen times and has documented their observations of the site with an abundance of videos and photographs. Most of their observations were tempered with the professional opinions of scientists and archaeologists. Therefore, varied sources will be considered to make conclusions about the interpretations of the rock art, inscriptions, natural features, and ancient structures at the site.

The matter of bias remains a challenge for all writers with a thesis statement they attempt to support. However, with the *entire body of information* presented here to support the Biblical significance of Jabal al Lawz, the objective reader should be challenged to favorably consider the conclusions of this dissertation. Can one *prove* this site was indeed the Biblical mountain? At present it is doubtful. The Saudi government would have to allow a team of western archaeologists and scientists to examine the site, to include a broader mix of opinion. The author will also raise some questions in this work as to the objectivity of the Saudi findings.

There are many structures, rock art, and inscriptions at this site that are significant. Some of the westerners who have viewed these sites, made hasty conclusions in some cases, as to their purpose or identity. Their opinions on these sites will be presented as well as the views of those who oppose their conclusions. Sometimes this writer will agree with the westerner,s conclusions, others times with the opposition.

Sometimes it will be determined that there is not enough evidence to make either conclusion. In several cases, the author will simply demonstrate that a site or structure is a feasible and reasonable match for a place or event found in the Exodus account. In many cases the structures, rock art, inscriptions, natural features, lay of the land, and all the other features about the site of Jabal al Lawz and the surrounding region fit the Biblical accounts far better than other explanations given for the features. Thus, while the author is not trying to force evidence to say what it does not say, arguments are provided to demonstrate in some cases, the feasibility of certain features supporting the Biblical significance of Jabal al Lawz. Some arguments, due to the nature of the information, will be stronger and more “cut and dried.” However, once again, looking at the entire body of information, the evidence lends support to the Biblical significance of Jabal al Lawz .

For the serious reader of this paper, it is recommended that the footnotes be consulted regularly. Much vital information and commentary are provided in these notes that will be very helpful to the reader.

I. The Bible as a Reliable Historic Record

A. The Authority, Inerrancy, and the Historical Accuracy of the Scripture

It is the viewpoint of the author that the Bible record is the most important source to determine the whereabouts of the Holy Mountain. The problem with pinpointing the location in modern times is corroborating the modern site with the location as it is given in the Bible. There is not enough evidence from the geographic details given in the Bible, to verify a site in Saudi Arabia or on the Sinai Peninsula, without using extra-Biblical evidence. However, whether scholars prove an event or a place in the Scripture was historical or not, it is the firm belief of the author that the Bible is correct and without error, and will be verified someday as many sites and events have already. If no verification is forthcoming, it will be understood that verification is hidden in antiquity. It is important to establish the authority of the Scripture at the onset of this thesis, and the information below will support this idea.

The Scripture itself claims inspiration. It says in II Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” [N.A.S.B.] The Greek word for inspired is the word *theopneustos* which means, God-breathed. Paul was referring not only to the Old Testament as inspired, but also his own writings and that of other apostles as well. Paul felt his own writings were “the Lord’s commandment” (I Corinthians 14:37). All sixty-six books of the canon, from the first word of Genesis to the last word of Revelation, and every word of the original autographs

were “divinely breathed-out”¹ through men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. II Peter 1:21 also supports this claim as it says in essence that no prophecy of Scripture is the product of man, but it is from the Spirit of God, as He moved in men’s minds and hearts and guided every word that was placed on the vellum or parchment. Notice in Exodus 24:4 where it says of Moses that he “wrote all the words of the Lord.” Jeremiah (30:20), Isaiah (30:8), and other prophets were commanded to write down the messages they received from the Lord. The position known as *plenary-verbal* inspiration of Scripture is of course not without its critics. It is not the goal of this paper to accomplish a thorough defense of this doctrine beyond a clear statement, but there are many sources that do so very well.²

Since the Bible or the Scriptures are the words of God, it is appropriate to conclude that when the Scriptures address history, they would be inerrant. This inerrancy would include dates, places, kingdoms, nations, names, events, etc. In the next section, examples of archaeological verification of the historical accuracy of Scripture will be presented. Despite the fact that complete inerrancy is confined only to the original autographs, the multiplicity of manuscripts that have survived enable us to virtually reproduce the originals through textual criticism.

Any copyist error that has been found has not corrupted or perverted God’s revelation. “The system of spiritual truth contained in the standard Hebrew text of the Old Testament is not in the slightest altered or compromised by any of

¹ Merrill Unger, Introductory Guide to the Old Testament. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973) 26. Merrill is quoting B.B Warfield’s description of the inspiration event.

²Ibid. pp. 22-45, also see, Gleason Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978) 19-34.

the variant readings found in the Hebrew manuscripts of earlier date found in the Dead Sea caves or anywhere else.”³ Our best “word for word” translations from both the Alexandrian tradition and the Byzantine tradition together reproduce the original manuscripts for our practical use. Modern students of the Scripture can be confident, that with accurate translations like the King James Version and the New American Standard Version, they have an inerrant text and an accurate chronicle of redemptive history within the backdrop of all time. With the availability of these two translations, there is a historically inerrant English text to rely upon.

The authority of the Bible can also be seen as one compares all the other religious writings that have survived. Other writings include the Koran, the Book of Mormon, the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Analects, the Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Other non-canonical works include the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha. Gleason Archer comments on the comparison of some of these works to the Bible:

To be sure, there are a few other religious scriptures which make the same claim for themselves, such as the Koran and the Book of Mormon. It must be conceded, however, that these two documents lack the credentials, which authenticate the Bible as the true record of God’s revelation. Most notably they lack the validation of prior prophecy and subsequent fulfillment, and the all-pervading presence of the divine-human Redeemer. The Book of Mormon is

³ Gleason Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978) 25.

vatiated by many historical inconsistencies and inaccuracies; and the Koran (which is claimed to have been dictated from a heavenly archetype coeternal with Allah) exhibits not only the most startling historical inaccuracies, but also the changing viewpoints of a human author (Mohammed) in the light of current events in his own day. Nor is there any comparison between the Bible and these other books when it comes to the grandeur and sublimity of thoughts it conveys or the power with which it penetrates the human soul with life-changing consequences.⁴

Some also doubt that oral tradition could have accurately transmitted a word for word body of truth down through the millennia. The discovery of the Creation Tablet at Elba, and other written accounts of a “Bible-like creation,” tell us “written accounts of the early records of Genesis could have been written on clay tablets and handed down from father to son and eventually came into the hands of Moses. Presumably Abraham took them across the Fertile Crescent, even as happened with one of the early versions of the flood found at Megiddo, dating to about the time of the conquest of Canaan by the Hebrews.”⁵ Gleason Archer has a bit different perspective on the transmission process: “The legacy of faith was handed down through the millennia from Adam to Moses in oral form, for the most part, but the final written form into which Moses cast it must have been

⁴ Ibid. 21.

⁵ Clifford Wilson, The Bible Comes Alive. Vol. 1 (Green Forest Az: New Leaf Press, 2000) 17.

especially superintended by the Holy Spirit in order to insure its divine trustworthiness.”⁶

The position of this paper is that the Scriptures are plenary-verbal inspired and have all authority, infallibility, and inerrancy regarding history. The Scriptures claim this of themselves, and have internal evidence to support this claim. There is also extra-biblical evidence from modern archaeology that supports the idea that the Bible is completely accurate in all its references to history.

B. Archaeological Verification of Biblical Accounts

Despite the fact that there have been many historical difficulties and apparent discrepancies in the Biblical text through the years; modern archaeology and linguistic research have put to rest many of these concerns. For instance, higher critics thought that the Hebrew patriarchs at one point were myths, and that the Hittite nation was a Biblical fabrication. R.P.R. De Vaux, and Sir Frederick Kenyon present the evidence supporting these Biblical facts.⁷ Many other examples of archaeological work verifying the Biblical record could be given, but for purposes here the voice of scholars will be offered. Nelson Glueck, the renowned Jewish archaeologist, wrote:

It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. William F. Albright, known for his reputation as one of the great archaeologists, states: ‘There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial

⁶ Archer, 21.

⁷ R.P.R De Vaux, Revue Biblique. 53, no. 3, pp. 321-328, and Sir Frederick Kenyon, The Bible and Archaeology. (New York, 1940) 81ff.

historicity of Old Testament tradition.’ Professor H.H. Rowley claims that ‘it is not because scholars of today begin with more conservative presuppositions than their predecessors that they have a much greater respect for the Patriarchal stories that was formerly common, but because the evidence warrants it.’ Millar Burrows of Yale observes: ‘Archaeology has in many cases refuted the views of modern critics. It has shown in a number of instances that these views rest on false assumptions and unreal artificial schemes of historical development.’ F.F. Bruce notes ‘Where Luke has been suspected of inaccuracy, and accuracy has been vindicated by some inscriptional evidence, it may be legitimate to say that archaeology has confirmed the New Testament record.’ Merrill Unger summarizes: ‘Old Testament archaeology has rediscovered whole nations, resurrected important peoples, and in a most astonishing manner filled in historical gaps, adding immeasurably to the knowledge of Biblical backgrounds.’⁸

Actually these quotes are just a small portion of the evidence put forward by McDowell, in his book.⁹ Though other historical difficulties still exist in the Scripture, and though the verification of the text may lay hidden in antiquity, the trend of modern archaeology to verify the Bible text, gives the Bible student complete confidence that he is reading *the* authoritative record of history.

⁸ Josh McDowell, Evidence That Demands a Verdict. (San Bernardino: Here’s Life Publishers, 1979) 65-66.

⁹ Ibid. 39-78.

Therefore, if modern archaeological methodologies or speculations contradict a historical fact or geographic placement¹⁰ in a Biblical account, the Scripture facts will be preferred.

II. A Summary of the History of the Search for Mount Sinai

Scores of books and hundreds of articles have been devoted through the years to determining the location of the Biblical Mount Sinai, and the route taken to its slopes. One source says Mt. Sinai has been *identified* in thirteen different locations, the Red Sea in nine places, and Kadesh Barnea at eight places.¹¹ Other scholars have determined over twenty possible locations for the Mountain of God.¹²

Early in the third century AD, the rise of the Christian monastic movement found Christian ascetics going into the desert [Sinai Peninsula from Egypt] to “get alone with God.” They were following the lead of Moses and Elijah. They made in a sense an “exodus out of Egypt,” into the “holy land.” They read the Biblical text with an allegorical approach, and they saw “symbols and images” of things everywhere and then they looked around at the large impressive mountains of Jebel Musa/Katerina and concluded that this was the site of Mt. Sinai. Therefore, by the fourth century AD, pilgrimages to this mountain became commonplace.¹³ Also, in this era, Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine received authority from her

¹⁰ For instance, the Bible makes it quite clear where the Wilderness of Shur is located without looking for external evidence. However, due to a desire to place the Red Sea crossing point in a particular location, some sincere explorers have overlooked it seems, the clear Bible directives here. Also, certain geographic locations have been clear to Bible students by just textual evidence through all antiquity, i.e. Great Sea, Jordan River, Euphrates River, etc. These reference points make certain Bible references to towns or peoples near these renowned locations, easier to verify without further archaeological work.

¹¹ Menshe Har-el, The Sinai Journeys. (San Diego: Ridgefield Publishing Company, 1983) 2.

¹² Joseph Hobbs, Mount Sinai. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995) p. 51; Emmanuel Anati, The Mountain of God. (New York:Rizzoli International Publications. Inc., 1986) 161.

¹³ The Exodus Revealed. Dir. Lad Allen. RPI/Campus Crusade for Christ. Discovery Media Productions, Videocassette. 2001. Dr. Allen Kerkeslager, who provides the information quoted in the text, is interviewed in the film, and had done much research in this area.

son to confirm a location for the Holy Mountain in this area. Then, in the sixth century AD, the monastery of St. Catherine was built by Emperor Justinian, giving the area the stamp of Rome, and subsequently many other believing traditionalists. Thorough archaeological explorations however, at Jebel Musa, Serbal, Catherine, and most of the Sinai Peninsula have not revealed any archaeological remains that might date back to the period of the Exodus. Except for a few Stone Age sites, the finds from this era date back to the Roman-Byzantine era and to the Middle Ages.¹⁴ There have however, been many other proposed sites. Some believe Serabit al-Khadim in west-central Sinai is the proven location because of the rich artwork and other occupational remains found there. Others believe it is Har Karkom (Mt. Safron) in the Negev Desert just northwest of Eliat (on the northern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba). Here too is an abundance of rock art, inscriptions, and stone monuments that some believe indicate this was a sacred site or a place of worship for about a thousand years. Another prominent proposal is Jebel Sin Bisher, about forty miles southeast of Suez. Geographer and Jewish scholar Menashe Har-El favors this rather diminutive mountain. Har-el believes this location is likely because there are circular mounds of stones at the base, and the location of Bisher fits Pharaoh's request to Moses for a three-day journey into the wilderness¹⁵ (Exodus 3:24), among other reasons. In the northeast Sinai, Jebel Halaal is supported by Claude Jarvis as the site of Mount Sinai.

¹⁴ Emmanuel Anati, The Mountain of God. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications. Inc.,) 161. Later in this paper, the reliability of archaeological dating is questioned with regard to items that would counter this thesis. Therefore, to be consistent, the dating of the items and sites in the Sinai Peninsula [and other sites] must also be considered as inexact.

¹⁵ Menshe Har-el, The Sinai Journey. 421-424.

Farther away from the traditional site, Charles Beke and A. Lucas placed Mt. Sinai at Jebel Baghir, just northeast of Aqaba at the Gulf of Aqaba's northern tip.

Nielsen puts Mt. Sinai at Petra, in southern Jordan, east of the Jordan rift.

Several men who support Jabal al Lawz as Mt. Sinai suggest the Exodus route and crossing point of the Red Sea should be changed from the Suez side of the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. C.C. Robertson has not identified a specific Mt. Sinai, but has placed Sinai somewhere between Wadi Arabia and Wadi Ithm in northwest Arabia. He says the holy mountain is one of the lower spurs of the as-Sera ridge of Mt. Seir.¹⁶ To give a very human side on the debate among scholars on this location, Hobbs says:

“This scholarly debate over Mount Sinai has always been lively. In the nineteenth century the experts undertook considerable hardship to reach southern Sinai. They walked hallowed ground with Bible in hand. Each experienced a special sense of revelation about the exact places where the divine events occurred. Each was unyielding in his convictions and attacked the others for not yielding to his. Edward Robinson and Dean Stanley, for example, reportedly were so certain that the Plain of ar-Raaha was the camping place that they would not set foot in rival Wadi Asba’iyya. Reverend G.S. Drew was indignant: ‘It is a shame for men like Robinson and Stanley to profess to inform the public

¹⁶ Joseph Hobbs, Mount Sinai, 51-53. Consult these pages for sources given for the different scholars and their opinions concerning the sites they propose.

about valleys which they have never traversed, but have judged of them from the tops of mountains.”¹⁷

Obviously this paper has *one* mountain in mind among these many candidates. Evidence will be presented that the author believes will narrow the field to only a few peaks, and eventually only one. The site of Jebel el Lawz is closely guarded in the country of Saudi Arabia, with archaeological fences surrounding various sites around its base. Some amateur explorers/archaeologists have become eyewitnesses of the site, but only at their own risk and peril, and only for a limited time. It will be seen later in this thesis, that some of these eyewitnesses actually visited the site many times and have documented what they have seen systematically and thoroughly. An excavation and survey of the site by archaeologists of the government of Saudi Arabia itself has been published, and will be considered later in this paper. However, with the mapping, photographic evidence, and studied opinions and research of several western eyewitnesses and some professional archaeologists, a strong case will be made for Jabal al Lawz as the actual Mountain of God.

¹⁷ Ibid. 54.

III. Arguments Concerning the Location of Ancient Midian in Northwest Saudi Arabia and Jordan

A. Arguments from within the Biblical Text

The land of Midian or its people are mentioned 67 times in the Bible. Moab was located east of the Jordan River across from the lower Dead Sea, according to most scholars. In Numbers 22: 4&7, Moab joined with Midian to defend against Israel. The country to the north of Moab was Ammon. To the south of Moab was Edom. Midian must have been juxtaposed to Moab and Edom to the south, as this would be the route Israel took as it moved north toward the Jordan crossing point. It can be concluded that Midian was south of Moab and Edom as it is well established that Edom was just south of Moab. Moab was located in what is present day Jordan, as was Edom.

In Judges 6:3-4, it says that the “Midainites would ‘come up’ with the Amalekites and the sons of the east, and go against them.” The Amalekites were a nomadic and marauding people that lived in the Negev.¹⁸ Of course, this doesn’t prove the exact location of the Midainites nation, due to the wandering of the Amalekites. Also, Midian could have cooperated with the sons of the east without being east of the Negev themselves. However, it would seem they would join with neighboring nations.

In Judges 7: 25, after Israel routed Midian, they chased them as they fled. Assuming they were fleeing toward their home, upon capturing and removing the heads of Midian’s two leaders, the men of Ephraim brought the heads “from

¹⁸ Merrill C. Tenney, Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975).

across the Jordan,” back to Gideon. This may allude to Midian’s southeastern location again as “across the Jordan” which meant east of it.

It can be established from Exodus 2:15, that after Moses fled Egypt, he *settled* in the land of Midian, with Jethro, the priest of Midian. Moses married Jethro’s daughter, and set up his home with them for forty years. Moses had the responsibility of pasturing the flock of his father-in-law’s sheep. Exodus 3:1 says that Moses led the flock “behind the wilderness,”¹⁹ and he came to Mt. Horeb, to the mountain of God. Was this still in Midian? Some have postulated that Mt. Sinai was not in Midian.²⁰ This conclusion is made because of two references regarding Jethro returning back to his land and kindred after visiting Moses at Mt. Sinai. In Exodus 18:27, after Jethro visits Moses and gives him advice about delegating authority, Moses sends Jethro back “to his own *land*.” Wherever Sinai was from Jethro’s actual home, it was close enough for Moses to pasture his sheep *regularly for forty years*. When Moses encouraged Jethro to come with the nation of Israel to the Promised Land in Numbers 10: 29-31, Jethro simply replied that he wanted to go back to his own people and relatives instead of staying with the Hebrew strangers. These references are not referring to a separate nation several days journey from the mountain, but to Jethro’s desire to return to his family in his home town on the other side of the wilderness, all of which are in Midian.

The use of the term “own land,” or “own land and relatives,” does not predispose that Jethro was traveling back to Midian from a separate country,

¹⁹ Jay P. Green, The Interlinear Hebrew-Aramaic Old Testament, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985) 145.

²⁰ Menashe Har-el, The Sinai Journeys, (San Diego: Ridgefield Publishing Company, 1983) 250.

rather, he was traveling back to his own home town and people from a nation of foreigners spread out in the desert. This use of the word ‘*eretz*’ (land) would be more in the sense of one’s own district or area. The word can mean, depending on its context, the earth itself, land in general, dirt or soil, or the actual tract of land owned or controlled by a ruler. The latter use is the one relevant to this discussion. This form used in Exodus 18:27 is found over 30 times in the Old Testament, with 13 in the Pentateuch. In each case, the word *eretz* refers to an actual physical tract of land under the direct control of a person mentioned in the text, not to a political/geographic designation. “In Numbers 21:24, 26, 34, 35, the phrase “his land,” refers to the physical tract of land under the direct control of Sihon, and then is further defined by geographic limits.”²¹ An example of another use of the word *eretz* in another passage is in Genesis 47:6. Here Pharaoh says to Joseph, “The land of *Egypt* is at your disposal; settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land, let them live in the *land of Goshen*...” Clearly Goshen is relatively close to where Joseph lived; yet it is referred to as what would seem to be a separate “land or country.” Goshen is clearly in Egypt. If Jacob ever visited Joseph at his headquarters, upon his departure it could be said that Jacob went back to his “own country and people” without traveling a great distance and without leaving the same country. Therefore, “one cannot equate the tract of land under Jethro’s control (“his land” of Exodus 18:27) with the greater political/geographic area of Midian in which Mt. Sinai is located.”²²

B. Other Arguments

²¹ Kenneth M. Durham, *Mt. Sinai in Arabia? A Response*. (Self-published paper), 2001. Published in response to an article in the Fall 2000 issue of *Bible and Spade*.

²² *Ibid.*

1. The Testimony of Josephus

There is some debate whether or not Josephus' testimony supports this paper's thesis or not. One writer makes the following statement: "Jewish historian Josephus, ca. 100 A.D...vindicates the traditional location of Mt. Sinai on the Sinai Peninsula against any Arabian claimant."²³ Sparks goes on to quote Josephus: "Moses went up to a mountain that lay between Egypt and Arabia, which was called Sinai..." without a proper treatment of the context.²⁴ Graham Davies, a noted scholar also suggests that Josephus located Mt Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula, because of this verse.²⁵

This passage from Against Apion is not representing the beliefs of Josephus. Here Josephus is summarizing Apions' version of the Exodus, in which Apion believes the journey from Egypt to Palestine took six days. This of course would not provide enough time for Israel to visit a site for Mt. Sinai in the southern Sinai Peninsula. Apions' sources for his conclusions have also been questioned.²⁶ Dr. Allen Kerkeslager, a professor at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, is the premier student of evidence borne from the ancients regarding Jewish pilgrimages to Mt Sinai from 500 BC to AD 70. Kerkeslager concludes: "It is probably best to understand Apion's unique placement of Mt. Sinai as his own

²³ Brad Sparks, ed. "Problems With Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia," January 30, 1997
<<http://www.ldorphin.org/sinai.html>>

²⁴ Flavius Josephus, The Complete Works of Josephus, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishers, 1981) 301-303, 623.

²⁵ Graham I. Davies, The Way of the Wilderness, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979) pp. 10-11.

²⁶ David Frankfurter, ed. Pilgrimage and Holy Space in the Late Antique Egypt, (London: Brill, 1998) 189-191.

creation.”²⁷ Josephus himself in his work entitled Against Apion, sums up his views on Apions’ scholarship, “and for the greatest part of what he says (Apion), it is very scurrilous, and, to speak no more than the plain truth, it shows him to be a very unlearned person, and what he says looks like the work of a man of very bad morals, and of one no better in his whole life than a mountebank.”²⁸ Josephus’ opinion on the views of Apion are quite clear and can be best summarized in his own words: “This is that novel account which the Egyptian Apion gives us concerning the Jews departure out of Egypt, and is no better than *a contrivance of his own*.”²⁹ (Emphasis added)

Thus, where did Josephus place Mt. Sinai? In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book II, Chapter 11, Verse one, he says of Moses after his flight from Egypt, “and when he came to the city Midian, which lay upon the Red Sea, ...”³⁰ In chapter 12, after Moses had settled in with Jethro or Raguel as Josephus puts it, he tends Jethro’s flock in or near the home of Jethro at the city of Madiane or Greek “*polis Madiane*.” Then, Moses drives his flocks to Sinai, where Josephus says, “is the highest of all the mountains thereabout.” Of course “thereabout” refers back to the region

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Flavius Josephus, The Complete Works of Josephus, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981) 622.

²⁹ Josephus, 623.

³⁰ Flavius Josephus, 58. The ancient geographer Ptolemy knew of two cities with a similar name that were located in N.W. Arabia, *Modiana* or *Madiama*. The former was on the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba, and the latter was inland, and was spelled much closer to the Madiam of the LXX/OG. Therefore, Ptolemy’s town of Madiama was likely the Biblical home of Jethro.

around the “city of Madaine.” Now, where did Josephus place Midian generally; was it in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula?³¹

Many ancient sources place Madian or the city of Maydan, just east of the Gulf of Aqaba, where the modern town of Al Bad is located. The tallest mountain near this town is Jabal al Lawz.

One might wonder from where Josephus derived his views on these locations. Did he personally make a pilgrimage there? Some think it came from his knowledge of the Septuagint.

2. The Evidence from the Septuagint/Old Greek Version

The earliest known source for Jewish traditions about the location of Mt. Sinai, other than the Bible itself, is the Septuagint or LXX/OG. Probably one of the most concise expressions of the importance of the Septuagint is found in The New Bible Dictionary: “[...] the Septuagint is the most important Greek translation of the Old Testament, and the oldest known influential translation in any language [...] the LXX occasionally preserves meanings of Hebrew words that were current when the LXX translation was made, but which were subsequently lost. It acts also as a linguistic and theological bridgehead between the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New; for it served as ‘Bible’ to generations of Greek-speaking Jews in many countries, and it is often quoted in the New Testament.”³²

³¹ Ibid. 59.

³² D.W. Gooding. “Text and Versions,” The New Bible Dictionary. 1974 ed.

The LXX/OG therefore, is an ancient witness dating back as far as 250BC. Again, Dr. Allen Kerkslager's thorough research on this point is important:

The LXX/OG translators transformed the Midianite location of Mt. Sinai into 'the land of Madiam' ...in a few cases the spelling is given as 'Madian' with no apparent difference in meaning and often with manuscript variants that read 'Madiam.'" The LXX/OG 'Madiam' and 'Madian' served as the standard Greek equivalents for the Hebrew Bible's word for 'Midian.' Thus 'Madiam' is associated in the LXX/OG with the traditional Midianite territory of northwestern Arabia.³³

Kerkslager summarizes his thoughts on the witness of the LXX/OG, by saying that the translations of the Hebrew "Midian" in the Septuagint as "Midain or Madiam," in the various references clearly links Mt. Sinai with a city nearby named as such. He then cites the work of several scholars who associate a present day town with this ancient city of Madyan, and makes the following point: "The location of the ancient city of Madyan can be firmly identified with the oasis of Al Bad' (Mugl a'ir Shu'ayb), which is located in northwestern Saudi Arabia, approximately 110 km south of Aqaba."³⁴

This evidence is significant as it is over 500 years nearer to the events of the Exodus, than the tradition that locates Mt. Sinai in the Sinai

³³ Allen Kerkslager, "Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Identity in Hellenistic and Early Roman Egypt." Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt. ed. David Frankfurter, (London: Brill, 1988) 156-157.

³⁴ Ibid.

Peninsula. So the translators of the LXX/OG seem to have indicated for us that the best information available in their day would locate Mt. Sinai in northwestern Arabia.

3. The Boundaries of Midian

There has been some difference of opinion regarding the actual geographic boundaries of Midian. It has been established above that Mt. Sinai lies within the boundaries of Midian, the nation, and that it is near the home of Jethro. Various archaeological and historical evidences for the geographic boundaries of the ancient homeland of the Biblical Midianites will now be examined.

a. The Testimony of Midianite Pottery

Surveys and excavations in the southwest Arabah, between 1959 and 1966, revealed a distinct pottery group. In 1969, Beno Rothenberg, compared some pottery he had found in the region generally identified with Biblical Midian in Northwest Arabia, with the pottery from the Arabah, and concluded Midian to be the place of its origin as well.³⁵ Midianite pottery seemed to have a single “center of production.”³⁶ This center of production is a city called Qurayyah, located about 70km northwest of Tabuk, Saudi Arabia. There are numerous places in the southern Arabah, northern Sinai, Israel, Edom, and in Timna, (about 20km north of the northern tip of Gulf of Aqaba)

³⁵ Garth Bawden, “Painted Pottery of Tayma, and Problems of Cultural Chronology in Northwest Arabia,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 24th ser. (1983): 37-52; Beno Rothenberg and Jonathan Glass, “The Midianite Pottery,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 24th ser. (1983): 65-124.

³⁶ Rothenberg, 111

where Midianite pottery has been found. However, all the pottery seems to have its origin “in one or several pottery workshops in the same neighborhood, using the same geological deposit.”³⁷ It was concluded that Qurayyah, deep in Midian, was the production center for Midianite pottery back to the Late Bronze Period, and it spread to other locations outside Midian, “through commercial channels or by the movement of people whose base was Qurayyah.”³⁸

Rothenberg conducted an expedition in the Sinai Peninsula in 1967-1968 where he covered considerable areas of northern and southern Sinai, recording over three hundred sites, and there was not a single Midianite shard found.³⁹ Although it is known that Midianites did some military raids on neighboring countries (Judges 6) through the centuries, and traveled to engage in trade (Genesis 37:36), it is apparent that northwest Saudi Arabia was their homeland and center of operations. This is based on the source of their pottery manufacturing. There is no definitive sign of Midian civilization in the Sinai Peninsula. Garth Bawden makes the statement that Peter J. Parr, who did research at Qurayyah, suggests that the “homeland of the makers of Midianite pottery was in the northern Hejaz.”⁴⁰ The testimony of Kerkeslager is an appropriate conclusion to this point: “The boundaries of Midianite territory were just slightly southwest of

³⁷ Rothenberg, 113.

³⁸ Rothenberg, 114.

³⁹ Rothenberg, 83.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Bawden, 39.

modern Eliat on the extreme northwestern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba.”⁴¹

b. The Testimony of Bible Atlases

The “standard” map of Palestine and its immediate neighbors can be seen in almost all Bible Atlases (Fig. 1). East of the Jordan Valley, across from Shechem, in the thirteenth century BC, the Israelites encountered the Amorites and the people of Ammon. South of Ammon, across from the lower Dead Sea was Moab, south of Moab was Edom, which went nearly to the north rim of the Gulf of Aqaba east of the Arabah. However some believe that Edom did extend due west of the Arabah into the Sinai Peninsula⁴² In the Hastings Dictionary of the Bible, Edom is placed almost entirely west of the Arabah, placing Mt. Seir, and the Wilderness of Zin, in the proximity of the traditional location of Kadesh-barnea, which is due south from Beersheba (Fig. 2). In Gilbert’s Jewish History Atlas, the placement of Edom is similar (Fig. 3).

In the majority of Bible Atlases, Midian is shown south of Edom, and east of the Gulf of Aqaba.⁴³ Also, it is of special interest

⁴¹ Allen Kerkeslager, “Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Identity in Hellenistic and Early Roman Egypt.” Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt, ed. David Frankfurter (London, Brill, 1988) 151.

⁴² James Hastings, ed., Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Scribner’s, 1963). map 5; Negev, AEHL (1986) 262; Martin Gilbert, ed. Jewish History Atlas (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1976) 2.

⁴³ Due to limited space an exhaustive list is impractical. A representative list follows: Eli Barnavi, ed. A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People. (New York: Schocken, 1992); William L. Langer, ed. An Encyclopedia of World History. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968); Geoffrey Barraclough, ed. The Times Atlas of World History. (New York: Hammond, 1978); John Baines & Jaromir Malek, eds. Atlas of Ancient Egypt. (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1980); Andrew Sherratt ed. Cambridge Encyclopedia of Archaeology. (New York: Crown Publishers/Cambridge University Press, 1980); James Pritchard, ed. The HarperCollins Concise Atlas of the Bible. (London: Times Books, 1991) pp. 15, 35. Herbert May, Oxford



Fig. 1. Map of Palestine, Oxford Bible Atlas (London: Oxford University Press, 1974) 57.

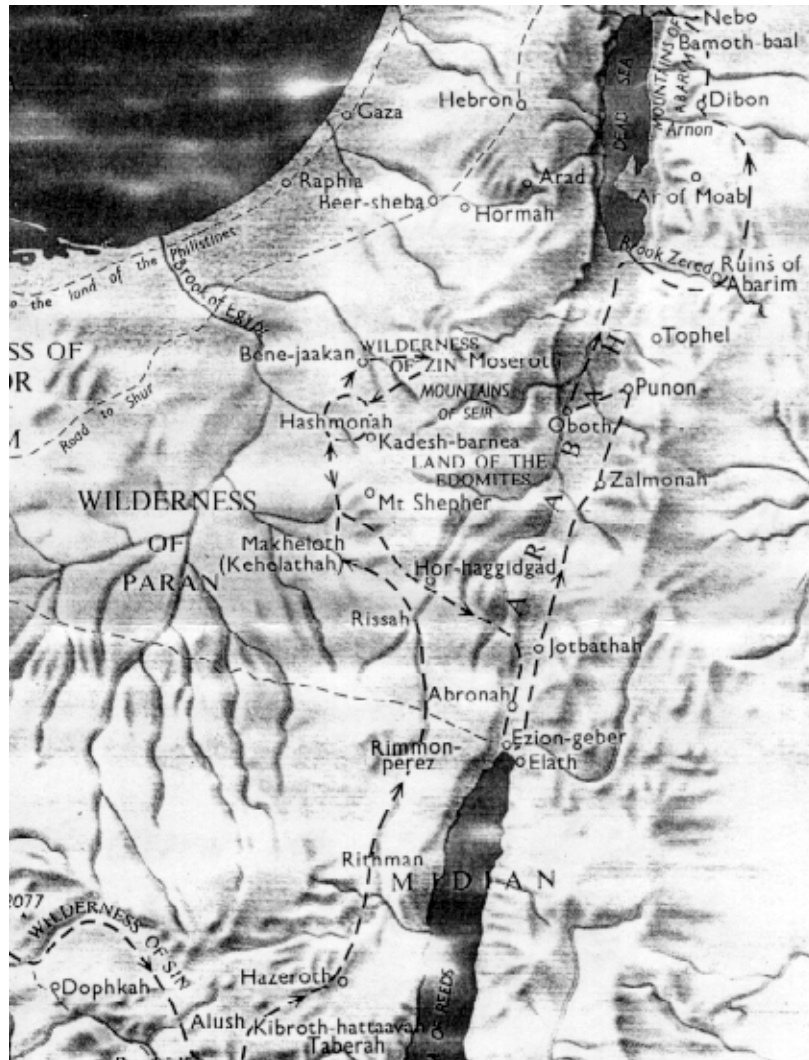


Fig. 2. Map of Wilderness Wanderings, James Hastings, ed. Dictionary of the Bible. (New York: Scribner's 1963) 262.

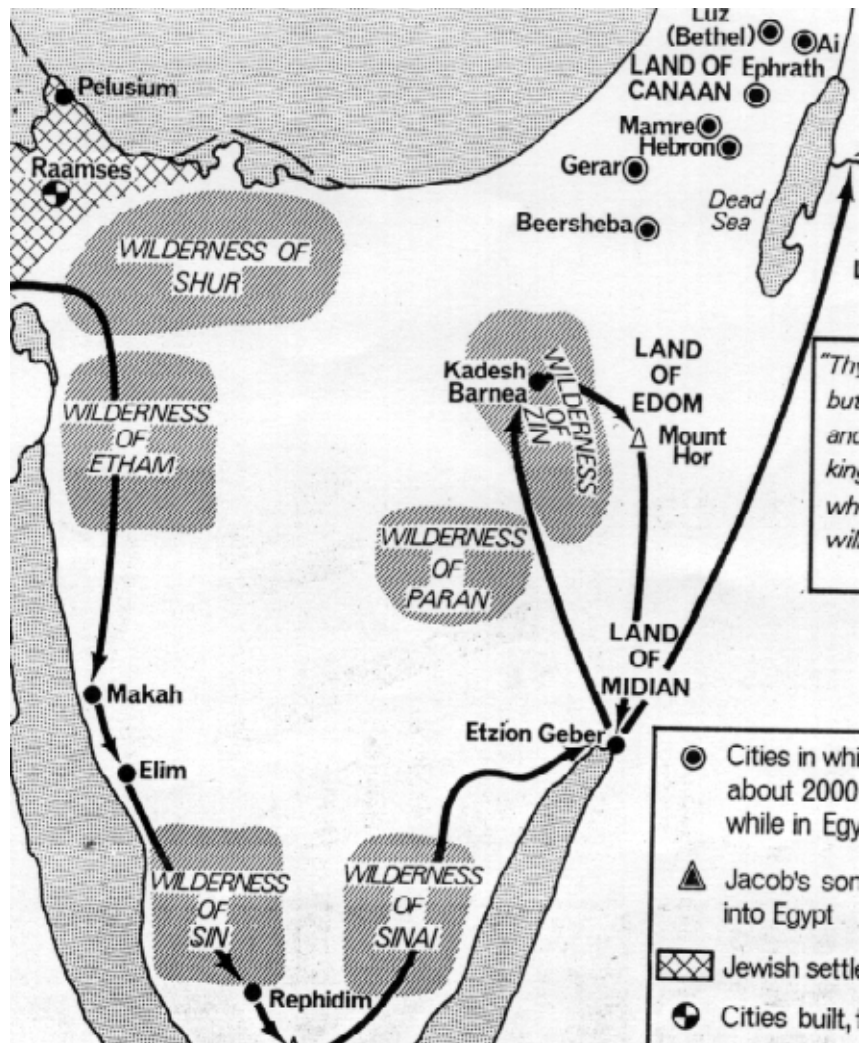


Fig. 3. Map of Promised Land. Martin Gilbert ed., *Jewish History Atlas*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1976) 2.

that the Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary picks up the LXX/OG spelling of the hometown of Jethro in its map section, “Madian” on map ten and “Madiama” on map eleven (Fig. 4). This reference work recognized the spelling used by the Septuagint for the city of Moses’ father-in-law, thus supporting the thesis that Midian was in what is now northwestern Saudi Arabia.

A critic of this view makes the following statement:

Midian was placed *at least partly* (emphasis added) in the Sinai by later authors (Antonius of Placentia, Italy, ca. 570A.D., Arab historian Makrizi, d. 1441). Some of the leading Bible archaeologists and scholars of modern times – William F. Albright, H.H. Rowley, G. Ernest Wright, Roland de Vex, Avraham Negev, and others also overlap Midian part way into the Sinai.⁴⁴

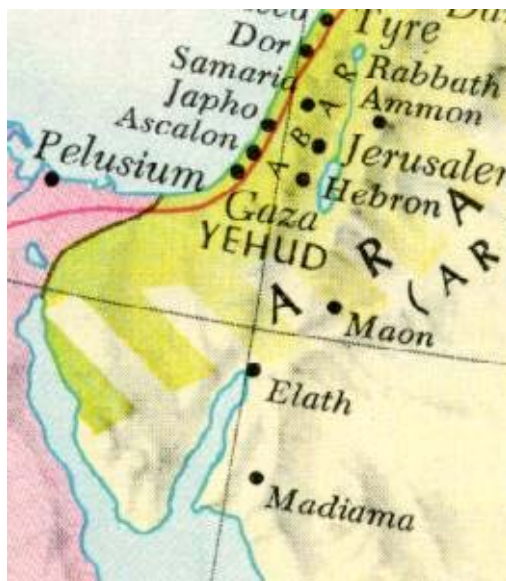
The Westminster Historical Atlas of the Bible adds some key information at this point. W. F. Albright of John Hopkins University, Millar Burrows of Yale University and O.R. Sellers of McCormick Theological Seminary *advised the editors* of this volume (emphasis added). On one map, Plate III, Midian is shown straddling the Gulf of

Bible Atlas. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974) 59. Merrill C. Tenney, The Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967). Notice also Werner Keller’s scholarly opinion, “The country of the Midianites.....lay to the east of the gulf of Aqaba. Arabian geographers knew of a town in that area still bearing the name Midian.” Werner Keller, The Bible as History in Pictures, (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1964) 91.

⁴⁴ Brad Sparks, comp. “Problems with Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia,” 30 Jan. 2002 <<http://www.idorphin.org/sinai.html>>.



Map 10. Merrill Tenney, The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967)



Map 11, Ibid.
Fig. 4

Aqaba representing the fifteen century BC time period. Then on Plate V, Midian is seen completely east of the Gulf of Aqaba, representing the thirteenth century BC. Albright and the editors favor the thirteenth century Exodus date and yet place Midian completely out of the Sinai Peninsula in that time period. It is important to notice the reasoning for placing Mt. Sinai in the traditional location, and how it may justify the expansion of Midian across the Gulf of Aqaba, [even in the fifteenth century which would comply with the other popular date for the Exodus]: “the tradition that this is the Mount Sinai of Israel is at least 1500 years old, *and it is difficult to see how the tradition could have arisen if it did not have some historical basis* (emphasis added) . . . Further, if the tradition is correct, we should be able to understand the presence of the Midianites at Sinai, among whom Moses’ father-in-law Jethro or Reuel (Ex. 2:16ff; 18:1ff). One Midianite clan was called the Kenites, meaning ‘metal smiths’ (Num. 10:29, and Judges 4:11). We may assume, therefore that one of the occupations of the Midianites was copper mining and smelting, and their interests in the mines of Sinai would be obvious. The attempt has been made to locate Mt. Sinai in Arabia, east of the Gulf of Aqaba, the *homeland* (emphasis added) of Midian.”⁴⁵ There are several concerns here. The writers assume that just because the tradition is old, it must have historical basis. It will be seen later that the traditions for Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia are

⁴⁵ George Wright and Flyod Filson, eds. The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956) 31ff.

much older. In addition, the writers fixed the *homeland* for Midian in Saudi Arabia, in the statement above. Thus, if there were any Midianites in the region of the traditional Mt Sinai at the time of the Exodus, they say they had to be working the nearby mines, but this did not constitute their homeland. Also, the Kenites were just one clan of the Midianites and should one conclude that they were working these mines at the time? A clan of Midianites working mines, if this were true, does not mean this whole area was Midianite territory or an extension of it. The placement of Midian across the Gulf of Aqaba, based on these conjectures, is not using sound reasoning. A clan of Midianite miners, at a couple of mines in the southwest of the Peninsula, which again is guesswork, does not justify expanding the Midianite territory into the Sinai Peninsula!

Most variant views place Midian extending slightly north and west of the Gulf of Ababa. The archaeological studies referred to above, however, extended the Midian border to modern day Eliat, which is only slightly outside the present-day Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Other sources beside Wright and Filson, [i.e. Hasting and Grollenberg]⁴⁶ have Midian straddling the Gulf of Aqaba, which seems to be completely untenable. It is curious in Father Grollenberg's Atlas that on one map, (Fig 5), he places Mt. Sinai in the traditional location, and on the same map, very near Jabal al Lawz, he writes on the map:

⁴⁶ L.H.Grollenberg, *Atlas of the Bible*. (Camden: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965) 44. Grollenberg seems to be a follower of W. F. Albright's influence, as he has Albright write the foreword for the book. See map 9.

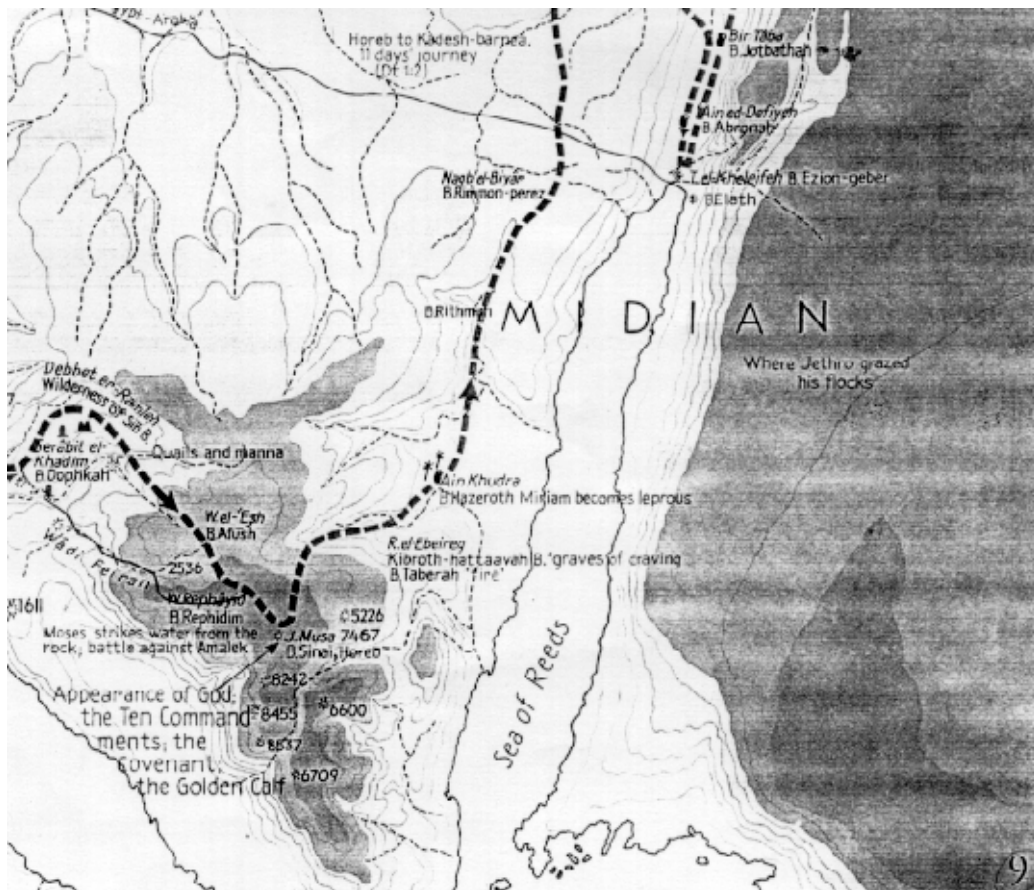


Fig. 5. Grollenberg's Map. L.H Grollenberg, Atlas of the Bible. (Camden: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965) 44, map 9.

“Where Jethro grazed his flocks.”⁴⁷ This poses a problem because Moses would pasture his father-in-law’s flocks, for the most part, by Jethro’s direction or suggestion. Exodus 3:1, says that Moses was grazing his flocks at the foot of Mt. Horeb. Thus Grollenberg’s caption, in essence, would place Moses’ grazing spot approximately 150 miles from where Jethro grazed his flocks? This certainly does not fit the Biblical narrative. It seems Grollenberg felt Moses took Jethro’s flock that distance from Jethro’s homeland to the Jebel Musa site. Beside the absurdity of the distance, the pasturelands were as they are today, better near Jabal al Lawz.⁴⁸

The fact that Midian proper may extend slightly north and west of the Gulf of Aqaba, does not counter the thesis that Mt. Sinai was in modern-day Saudi Arabia. The theory that Jethro’s hometown was located in modern-day al Bad, and that Mt. Sinai is Jabal al Lawz, is not affected by the extension of the border of Midian to modern Eliat; but to say Midian could extend completely around the Gulf of Aqaba to the opposite shore has no archaeological support at this time.⁴⁹ The borders and territories of Egypt in the Late Bronze Age will also be examined to establish the unlikelihood of Midian settlement on the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba.

c. The Testimony of Egyptian Territory

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ The question of the suitability of pasturing at these two mountains will be dealt with in upcoming chapters.

⁴⁹ See arguments above concerning the studies done by Rothenberg, Bawden, and Parr.

Another way to determine that Biblical Midian was in northwestern Saudi Arabia/Southern Jordan, is to establish what the border or territory of Egypt was during the time of the Exodus. It is likely that an area that has long been a “protectorate” of Egypt would not constitute the “homeland” of Midian. Local nations around the Timnah copper mines, including the Midianites, worked for Egypt at their mines.⁵⁰ Also, the Midianites certainly roamed and raided neighboring nations, but there is evidence that the borders of Midian, as noted above, were indeed their borders some time before, during, and after the Exodus until the rise of the Nabatean kingdom.

If possible, the time period of the Exodus needs to be determined. This is a matter of debate among scholars. Since the Bible does not name the Pharaoh, and because there is limited extra-Biblical evidence for the event, pinpointing the date and dynasty is complicated. However, if one leans heavily on the accuracy of the Biblical record, one can calculate a time period indirectly. In I Kings 6:1, it states that 480 years passed from the Exodus to the construction of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem. Solomon reigned during the second third of the tenth century BC, so this would place the Exodus no later than the second third of the fifteenth century BC (1450 – 1430 BC). This date is confirmed by Judges 11:26, which states that three hundred years elapsed from the time that Israel invaded Canaan to the time of Jephthah, who judged Israel in the second half of the twelfth

⁵⁰ See arguments below regarding the Timnah mines.

century BC. Those scholars who feel the *Habiru* of the Tell el-Amarna Letters are indeed Israel, favor this date. This would place the Exodus in the eighteenth Egyptian Dynasty of the New Kingdom, with Thutmose III possibly being the enslaver of the Israelites and Amenhotep II, the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

Most scholars, however, believe the Exodus took place in the nineteenth Egyptian Dynasty of the New Kingdom, under either Seti I, or Ramses II in around 1290-1270 BC. They feel that Egypt was too strong for the Israelites to revolt in the eighteenth dynasty, and that the numbers given in I Kings 6:1, are only historically tenable if one considers them symbolic (i.e. marking 12 generations of 40 years each). One of the strongest arguments given to support this date is the inscription found called *Merneptah* (The Israel Stela), which supports the idea that Israel was already in Canaan in the second half of the thirteenth century BC. Other arguments and theories supporting this view seem to make excuses for the “unrealistic” numbers the Scripture gives for the number of years and generations, and more readily use imperfect archaeological evidence as more valid than the testimony of Scripture.⁵¹ The Bible's track record for historic accuracy among ancient documents has no peers.⁵² However, most of the written material today on the time of the Exodus will support the

⁵¹ Geoffrey Wigoder, ed. *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Vol. 6, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971) 1044 –1046.

⁵² Josh McDowell, 55-74. Also note a quote by John Elder, “Nowhere has archaeological discovery refuted the Bible as history.” Gleason Archer, 166.

viewpoint that the Exodus must have taken place in the first half of the thirteenth century. For the purposes of this thesis, the author will track the influence of Egypt over its surrounding territories between 1500 BC – 1270 BC, including both popular Exodus time theories.

Long before the New Kingdom, Egypt was exerting its influence over the Sinai Peninsula.⁵³ A lot closer to the Exodus dates in the reign of Amenhotep I (1529 – 1509), “there is evidence that he (Amenhotep I) exercised control over Nubia, the oasis in the Western Desert, and Sinai.”⁵⁴ To be consistent, the point is being made that just as Midian had “ancient homeland borders,” and she would wander from these borders for trade and temporary conquest, so would Egypt. Most would place Egypt’s “ancient homeland borders” east of the Nile River up to and around what is now the Suez Canal.⁵⁵ Notice the opinion of Roland Harrison: “while the Egyptians of the 19th dynasty generally regarded the Pelusiac region as the border of Egypt proper, this has no necessary bearing upon Israel’s concept of her own

⁵³ Patrick O’Brien, ed. Atlas of World History. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 30, 109. In the early part of the First Dynasty (2925-2575B.C.), “Egypt extended its influence into southern Palestine and probably Sinai.” 109.

⁵⁴ Leonard H. Lesko, Encyclopedia Americana International vol.10. (Danbury: Grolier, 2000) 25.

⁵⁵ Upon consulting multiple sources, the assumption is in each, that *Egypt proper* was indeed west of the Red Sea (Suez). Note the following quotes, and then several source references. In the introduction of “Egypt’s Borders Negev” it says: “A land situated along the southeastern shores of the Mediterranean, bordered by the Red Sea on the east and Libya on the west. It’s southern boundary changed in different periods.” Avraham Negev, ed. The Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land 3rd ed. (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1990) 123. Notice that Negev did not mention any change in the east political border. Notice also: John L. McKenzie ed. Dictionary of the Bible (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1965) 212. Other sources consulted in agreement; Wigoder, Encyclopedia Judaica. 503; Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible 231. Geoffrey Wigoder, ed. Illustrated Dictionary and Concordance of the Bible. (New York: Macmillan Publishing House, 1986) 298. John D. Davis, ed. Davis Dictionary of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972) 198; David Freedman, ed. Anchor Bible Dictionary vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 331-332.

boundaries.”⁵⁶ However, as noted earlier, there is very ancient evidence that Egypt held political and military influence over most or all of the Sinai Peninsula during Moses’ time. What this implies, from evidence thus far, is that for Israel to leave Egypt’s homeland and territory of influence (Sinai Peninsula) and enter Midian, it would mean Midian should be beyond the Sinai Peninsula to its east. As stated above, Midian has been determined to be south of Edom, east of the Gulf of Aqaba in present-day Saudi Arabia and part of southern Jordan.

A line of argument that transcends the matter of Egyptian influence in a particular period of time is the issue of the “Brook of Egypt.” The Scripture clearly indicates that the Brook of Egypt was Israel’s southern border.⁵⁷ In Joshua 15:47, it places the Brook of Egypt near the Philistine towns of Gaza and Ashdod. Some feel this brook is a reference to the Nile River, but the Hebrew term for “brook” speaks of a wadi-like stream, not a continually flowing river. Actually many scholars have identified the Brook of Egypt with present-day Wadi-el-Arish. One source says, “The Brook of Egypt was not an Egyptian stream at all, but a little desert stream near the borderland of Egypt. A wadi of the desert, and perhaps, the dividing line between Canaan and Egypt. It is usually identified with the Wady al’Arish of

⁵⁶ James Orr, ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979) 549-550.

⁵⁷ See Numbers 34:5, Josh. 15:4, 47; I Kings 8:65, 2 Kings 24:7, 2 Chron. 7:8.

modern geography.”⁵⁸ Yet another source says: “If the ‘wadi of Egypt’ is not the Nile, the best alternative is the Wadi al’ Arish, which runs north out of Sinai to the Mediterranean about 90 miles east of Egypt proper [. . .] and some 50 miles west of Gaza in Palestine,”⁵⁹ Insight drawn from the Septuagint: “Its identification with the Wadi al’ Arish [the Brook of Egypt] is found in the Septuagint (Isaiah 27:12) which translates it Rhinokoroura, ‘the Greek name of the city near its mouth.’”⁶⁰ If one would follow Wadi el’ Arish southeastward to what is now Eliat, this would be a very workable border for Egypt back to time of the Exodus based on the borders draw in Numbers 34. This border can be seen in (Fig. 6) the Westminster Historical Atlas of the Bible, as it displays this border in David and Solomon’s day. However, there are other arguments that Egypt’s “protectorate” border may have passed near this “straight line” through Wadi el’ Arish. This is important because the fleeing Hebrews needed not only to be out of cosmopolitan or rural Egypt proper, but also out of any Egyptian jurisdiction or army presence. Of course this is what Moses was fleeing when he first came to Midian--to distance himself completely from Pharaoh. Surely Moses knew all the places in the Sinai, being raised in all the wisdom of Egypt, where there was any Egyptian presence, garrison, or enterprises. He wanted to get completely away from any Egyptian influence. Another issue that can influence this

⁵⁸ Orr, The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 549-550

⁵⁹ “Wadi al’ Arish,” The New Bible Dictionary. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1974) 354.

⁶⁰ Geoffrey Wigoder, ed. Encyclopedia Judaica vol. 6 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971) 503.

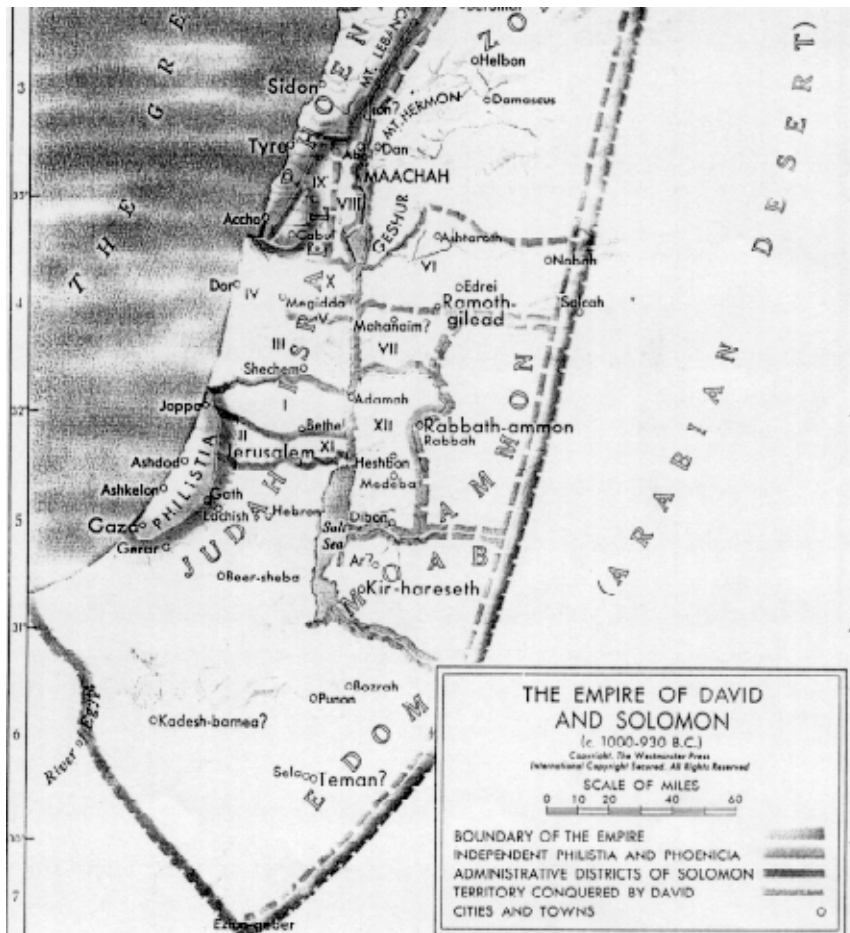


Fig. 6. Border of Israel. Wright and Filson. The Westminster Historical Atlas of the Bible. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), Map A

point is the Timnah copper mines twenty miles north of present-day Eliat.⁶¹

The Egyptian-run copper mines at Timnah are well documented.⁶² Mining in the Sinai Peninsula dates back to as early as the First Dynasty, 3100-2900 BC. In the mid to southwest Sinai were at least several slave mines of the Egyptians: Wadi Maghara, Serabit el Khadim, and Wadi e-Nasb. These were turquoise mines and there was some copper smelting done at Serabit el Khadim.⁶³ Har'el has stated that there must have been a perpetual presence of an Egyptian army at the mines mentioned above. He was contradicting William Flanders Petrie's view and John Bright's view that there were not permanent garrisons at these mines.⁶⁴ Har'el's reasoning is as follows:

The Egyptian mines were royal property; they were the only turquoise and copper mines of the pharaohs throughout the Land of Egypt, and the rulers acquired great wealth from them; these mines were in the desert outside the territorial border of Egypt (homeland) parenthesis mine (Genesis XLVII: 21), which passed east of the delta. Thus it was essential that the output from the mines be defended, both from theft by the

⁶¹ Gaalyah Cornfeld and David Freedman, Archaeology of the Bible: Book-by-Book, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1976) 42.

⁶² Independent research will confirm this fact. The excavations of Y. Aharoni and B. Rothenberg at the mining center in the Timnah valley revealed many helpful details about the operation.

⁶³ Har'el, The Sinai Journeys, 215-223.

⁶⁴ Sparks, 5.

miners and from the nomadic desert-tribes who moved along the transportation routes. We can also deduce from the inscriptions found in the mines, that the mine-workers were foreign slaves who would require constant guarding to prevent their escape.⁶⁵

It would stand to reason this would be the standard wherever the mines of Egypt were found in the Sinai. This would be altered only if the mine were completely shut down.

The mine at Timnah would doubtless help define a border of influence and domination for Egypt, and surely not make a good area for a permanent homeland of the Midian nation. As previously noted, if a line through the Brook of Egypt southeastward to Eliat would constitute a logical border of influence or “protectorate” of Egypt, then the location of Timnah would fit well along that border. This would allow for Midian’s ancient borders coming north/northwest of the Gulf to the southern border of Edom, but not west into the Sinai. This would concur with the border proposed by Kerkeslager.⁶⁶

Rothenberg believes that most of the copper mining at Timnah was from the fourteenth to the twelfth centuries BC (nineteenth – twentieth Dynasties). This would of course make the mine argument more relevant for those who embrace the later date of the Exodus during the nineteenth dynasty. However, with the other arguments

⁶⁵ Har’el, *The Sinai Journeys*, 224.

⁶⁶ Kerkeslager, 151.

already put forth in this thesis, Moses would have found the protectorate borders of Egypt reaching to the northern tip of Aqaba in the eighteenth Dynasty as well, with the corresponding homeland borders of Midian in its most popular location in N.W. Saudi Arabia as well.

d. The Testimony of Prominent Scholars

John Philby came to Arabia for the first time in 1917. He traveled the country extensively and devoted the greater part of his life to Saudi Arabia. He saw more of the Hejaz [northwestern section] of Saudi Arabia than Doughty, Burton, Wallen, Eating, Huber, Janssen, Savignac, Musil and Carruthers put together. To Philby, there is no question that Midian is in Saudi Arabia, along the Gulf of Aqaba. He says, “There is nothing extravagant in the assumption that the many points of vantage along the river (Wadi Afal near Jabal al Lawz) leading to their main centers farther south were occupied by ancient Midians[...]⁶⁷ Alois Musil, also well traveled in this area made this observation:

In the environs of the oasis of al-Bed’ [modern city located at the ancient town of Madiam] I locate the settlements of the tribe of Madian. According to the Bible the Midainites belonged to the descendants of Abraham by Keturah. Reference to these descendants is also made in the Assyrian records, but there are not

⁶⁷ John Philby, The Land of Midian (London: Earnest Benn Limited, 1957) 206.

enough particulars given in these records to enable us precisely to fix the limits of the area they occupied in the south and east. [Notice Musil does not question the western border.] The Assyrian and Biblical records place their camps and settlements to the south and southwest of Ma'on (Ma'an) [in southern Edom or modern Jordan] as well to the east and southeast of the Gulf of Aqaba. The southernmost of their settlements hitherto known was the oasis of Dedan, or the modern al'Ela. Their main group, those known as Midianites were encamped in the region of Hesma [region east of the Gulf of Aqaba, extending north into modern Jordan]⁶⁸ and in the neighboring territories; that is to say, where the classic writers also located the Madianites⁶⁹ (Fig. 7).

Yet another scholar, James Montgomery says, that after Sarah's death Abraham married Keturah and his best-known son is Midian. "His territory can be definitely located as along the upper stretch of the Red Sea littoral, upon data furnished by the classical and Arab geographers."⁷⁰ These three men represent some of the more prominent scholars of Arabian history. They have given quite specific ideas on the ancient borders of Midian.

⁶⁸ Herman Guthe, Bible Atlas. (Leipzig: Wagner and E. Debes, 1911) map 5.

⁶⁹ Alois Musil, The Northern Hegaz (New York: American Geographical Society, 1926) 282.

⁷⁰ James Montgomery, Arabia and the Bible, (Philadelphia: KTAVPublishing House, 1969) 43.



Fig. 7. Traditional Location of Midian. Herbert May, *Oxford Bible Atlas*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974) 59.

4. The Testimony of Saudi Arabian Scholars/Archaeologists

No treatment of the topic of the location of Midian in Saudi Arabia would be complete without the opinions of the archaeologists of the host government. Although many qualified non- Saudi scholars have studied and traveled the region, and made their conclusions, it remains prudent to consider the opinions of those who have had the most open access to all the sites in question.

All of these opinions are taken from the new book published by the Deputy Ministry of Antiquities and Museums, Al-Bid ‘ History and Archaeology. Six Saudi archaeologists were involved in researching and writing this work. Regarding their opinions on the *historic* location of ancient Midian, they offer similar evidence as given above, as well as some additional Islamic sources. However, there is some variance in their conclusions based on their excavations.

In the preface Professor Dr. Abdul Rahman al-Tayyib al Ansari makes the following statement with no qualifications, as if stated as historic fact:

The civilization in the northwest of Saudi Arabia began before prehistory, the area witnessed the civilizations of ‘Aad and Thamud at about the 3rd millennium BC; then appeared the civilization of Midian, it was the civilization mentioned in the Holy Quran which tells us the story of

Prophet Shu'aib, who lived in culture in which the powerful destroyed and command the poor.⁷¹

Here Al-Ansary associates northwest Saudi Arabia with Midian, and then implies this association is backed up in the Quran .He Then makes the following statement: “There are many historic events and legends about the area but all without evidence.” And then he claims this is the first book based on scientific research and investigation on al-Bid and its environs. He then says: “ I hope the Deputy of Ministry of Antiquities and Museums shall continue such investigations and produce publications on other areas of the Kingdom so that the people know the true history and its past civilizations and stop those who try to distort our history and culture by false and fictitious accounts and know the different between distortion and reality.”⁷² This writer does not understand the exact nature of what al-Ansary meant by those who “distort their history and culture by false and fictitious accounts.” It does seem that his comments are reactionary.

On page 13 of Saudi’s book, part of the mountains of the Hijaz in northwest Saudi Arabia are referred to as the mountains of Midian. On page 15 it says: “Al-Bid ‘ [i.e.- Bad, or Madyan, or Modiana, or Midian City] had been known as Midian. It was one of the most important towns in northwest Arabia during the reign of Adom and Midian kingdoms. These kingdoms were among other Arab kingdoms that appeared during the second millennium BC and continued to the middle of the first

⁷¹ Abdul-Rahman al Tayyib al-Ansary, *Al-Bid ‘ History and Archaeology*. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Deputy Ministry of Antiquities and Museums, 2002) 9.

⁷² Al Ansary, 11.

millennium BC.” In chapter one, the authors quote Islamic sources on the subject of Al-Bid. A famous writer named al-Yaqubi says on page 17: “Midian is a populous, ancient town with many springs, rivers, and an abundance of gardens, orchards, and palm trees inhabited by different ethnic groups.” “Al-Sharif quoted from the early geographers, ‘at the coast of Qulzum Sea, [Gulf of Aqaba] lies the city of Midian, which is larger than Tabuk. Inside the town was the well from which Moses (Peace be upon him) extracted water for the livestock of Shu’aib.’”⁷³ Shu’aib is the Islamic name for Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. “Midian was named after the tribe of Shuaib.”⁷⁴ The book quotes seven other Islamic sources with similar conclusions.

The book then references Richard Burton, Alois Musil, and John Philby, two of the three mentioned in this thesis as western sources. The next section of the book mentions the opinions of contemporary Arab writers. Some of these writers described merely what they saw in the region of the Hejaz, with no reference to the Midian question. However, Jawad Ali is said to have discussed in his book, “in detail the history of Midian and Hisma, relying on information gathered by Muslim geographers, travelers, and historians as well as European travelers.”⁷⁵ Al Quthami also mentions Midian. “He suggested that the name Midian was of an ancient Kingdom in Hijaz, the ruins of which are still standing today.

⁷³ Al-Ansary, 17.

⁷⁴ Al-Ansary, 17-18.

⁷⁵ Al-Ansary, 22.

At present its capitol city is known as al-Bid ‘.’⁷⁶ He described Midian’s ancient antiquities, in particular the Nabataean tombs of Maghair Shu‘aib about which he says: “It is evident that all these tombs are Nabataean, hence, they had been established after *at least 2500 years from Jethro’s (Shu’aib) time*”⁷⁷ (emphasis added).

There is such a preponderance of historical information and scholarship from many sources and times periods supporting Midian in Saudi Arabia, one must weigh the conclusions of the Deputy Minister of Antiquities carefully. In the conclusion of the book, the term “historic legends” is used to refer to the account of the stay of Moses at al-Bid and the resulting Exodus of the Jews into that territory.⁷⁸ The Saudi’s do admit “some historians have also associated it [al-Bad] with the Exodus of Moses and his followers. There is no doubt that a well has also been named after the Prophet Moses and the local people feel proud and honored to associate their town with Moses, but recent intensive and comprehensive archaeological investigations do not provide evidence to support these stories.”⁷⁹ Their final conclusion regarding the Midian question is summarized in the following statement: “There is a controversy regarding the prehistoric settlement in al-Bid area or what is called a “Midian.” The archaeological evidence does not support the possibility of a large settlement in or around a-Bid. All the evidence either dates back to the

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Al-Ansary, 79.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Neolithic period or more recent Nabataean/Roman period. “Precise dating evidence is lacking for ‘Midian’ occupation in northwestern Arabia yet pottery parallels to Timna in Wadi Arabia suggest that the beginning of occupation at Qurayah, located northwest of Tabuk was in the 12th –13th Century BC (Parr et al, 1970; Rotenberg, 1972). Most of the sites in al-Bid area are related to the Nabataean/Roman period.”⁸⁰

The Saudi’s admit that many historians, geographers, travelers, and learned men from antiquity have acknowledged the unmistakable link between northwest Saudi Arabia and the land of Midian, and the city of Midian, as the home of Jethro, but have sacrificed all this evidence on the altar of modern archaeology. Later in this thesis the inexactness of certain aspects of archaeological science will be discussed. The book itself admitted the heavy human traffic and presence in the al-Bid region from the Paleolithic period to the present day. Its population increased and decreased, and it served the trade caravans, pilgrims and other travelers.⁸¹ This observation points out several things. A civilization 2500 years older than the Nabataean ruins could readily be lost in antiquity in an area where rising and falling populations of various groups may dismantle old dwellings upon building new. Also, there are always questions on proper identification of existing ruins. Therefore, the fact that there may not be any structures or artifacts from an ancient Bedouin community thousands of years old is not conclusive evidence that Midian did not exist in

⁸⁰ Al-Ansary, 89.

⁸¹ Al-Ansary, 79.

northwest Saudi Arabia, and that al-Bad was not ancient Madiam, the home of Jethro.

The quote mentioned earlier by the Saudi archaeologists seems to imply that Peter Parr and Beno Rothenberg did not support a Midian occupation at the time of the Exodus. Parr simply said that it is difficult to get a *precise* date for the extent of Midian's kingdom in northwestern Saudi Arabia. Parr goes on to say that the pottery parallels between Timna and Qurayyah demonstrate that their occupation (at least at Qurayyah), began in the twelfth - thirteenth centuries. These dates would support the later Exodus date.

The fact that the Saudi's could not find structural remains, pottery, rock art, or inscriptions that verify the clear record of history regarding Midian being in the northwestern corner of their country, does not mean that it will not be forthcoming. The lack of evidence for the Hittites, the Horites, Sargon II, and Belshazzar, did not mean they did not exist. Eventually their historicity was established. Even though the tombs of Magha'ir Shu'aib were visited by several European archaeologists (Musil, Philby, Parr) and attributed to the Nabatean period, they still acknowledged the region in the past to be the home of the Midianites. From the LXX/OG place-name identifying Madiam in Saudi Arabia, to the ancient local traditions concerning Moses around al-Bad, a "Saudi-Midian" is supported by stronger evidence.

IV. Arguments Concerning the Location of the Apostle Paul's "Arabia" in Northwest Saudi Arabia and Jordan

Within the Biblical text is a statement by the Apostle Paul through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which gives insight into the location of Mt. Sinai. Paul locates Mt. Sinai in "Arabia," in Galatians 4:25. Paul also says that he traveled to "Arabia," in Galatians 1:17. The question is, what geographic area was Paul referring to in these statements? Did this include all of what is known today as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Edom, and Moab? Did Arabia include the entire Sinai Peninsula, and thus include the traditional site for Mt. Sinai, or was it restricted to an area which is known today as Saudi Arabia, thus giving evidence for Jabal al Lawz. Writers for the Bible and Spade, in the Fall 2000 issue, argue that Paul's reference can refer not only to Saudi Arabia, but also to the Sinai Peninsula.⁸² Brad Sparks quotes Cambridge scholar Graham Davies as saying that Arabia in Paul's time covered a wide area that included the Sinai Peninsula, thus in his mind proving that Paul's reference could be consistent with the traditional site on the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula.⁸³ The first argument to counter these views will address the Biblical text and context, the testimony of Bible atlases, and a look at the evidence from various scholars.

A. Insights from the Biblical Text and Context

As noted above, two references by Paul in the book of Galatians have some significance to this thesis. In Galatians 1:17, Paul says that after his conversion, rather than immediately traveling to Jerusalem to be instructed by the Apostles, he went to "Arabia" evidently to spend some time with the Lord. Then

⁸² Gordon Franz, "Is Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia?" The Bible and Spade 13 .4 Fall (2000): 109-110.

⁸³ Brad Sparks, 5.

in Galatians 4:25, Paul says quite clearly that Mt. Sinai is in Arabia. Can anything in the text or context of this reference reveal that Paul was speaking of the area that generally complies with modern-day Saudi Arabia?

One must first consider what Paul meant by Arabia and what background he was drawing from as he used the term. It is also important who his readers were. Paul was steeped in Judaism (Acts 22:3, Gal. 1:14, Phil. 3:5-6), and very knowledgeable of the Old Testament. He doubtless was familiar with any usage of the term Arabia in the Old Testament. He also would make sure that his readers knew what he meant by the term. In the context of Galatians, Paul is dealing with Jews who were trying to undermine justification by faith. For these Jewish readers in Galatia, Paul would likely write from a Jewish understanding of the term, based on its usage in the Old Testament. The use of the word “Arabia” in one Old Testament passage especially (II Chronicles 9:14) sheds some light on the topic. In this passage the chronicler begins to list in verse thirteen the wealth that was brought into Israel during Solomon’s reign. Verse fourteen says: “besides that which the traders and merchants brought; and all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon.” Paul’s Arabia then was a land understood by Jewish readers who were familiar with the Old Testament usage, to be a land that paid heavy tribute to Solomon. According to Jewish scholar Menashe Har-el the Sinai never sustained such kings, governors and wealth to pay tribute to Solomon: “The wilderness of Sinai has been sparsely populated for the greater part of history.”⁸⁴ It is also known from scholars of the

⁸⁴ Har-el, The Sinai Journeys, 1.

Arabian Peninsula, that Arabia Felix or Yemen, was a major source of precious substances to the ancient world.⁸⁵

Another Old Testament verse of importance is Isaiah 21:13, “The burden against Arabia. In the forest in Arabia you will lodge, O you traveling companies of Dedanites.” “Dedan has now been identified topographically as the modern ‘el-Ula’ in the land of Midian in the northwest of the Peninsula.”⁸⁶ This text clearly associates the term Arabia with a people originating in ancient Dedan, which is in northwest Saudi Arabia. Once again, Paul could be communicating the ancient traditions to his Jewish readers, not the more contemporary Roman borders, which did not put Arabia in the Sinai Peninsula until after Paul’s death. This argument will be presented later.

Still another point is the influence the LXX/OG had on the thinking of Paul regarding the location of Arabia. The LXX/OG was the Bible of the apostles, Christ, and the early church. As noted above, the use of the name “Madiam” by the LXX/OG translators betrays a contemporary site location, that location being in Saudi Arabia.

For the sake of argument, providing that Paul’s readers would not have understood Arabia to mean only what we know as modern Saudi Arabia, his audience may have been use to the purely geographic use of the term found in popular Greco-Roman authors at the time. Quoting Kerkeslager at this point:

⁸⁵ Gus van Beek, updating the 1930/1934 lectures of James A Montgomery, professor of Hebrew and Aramaic at the University of Pa, said this concerning south Arabia or Yemen, “ southern Arabia had a monopoly on the production and distribution of frankincense, and myrrh in the ancient world.”(Montgomery, XIX). Despite the fact that Montgomery avoids treatment of Arabia with exception of the Sinai Peninsula, when he describes the traffic of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, he without a doubt is speaking of the Arabia Felix. (Montgomery 181-182). Note other scholar’s writings on Arabia Felix.

⁸⁶ Montgomery, 43.

Paul thus may have used ‘Arabia’ in Galatians 1:17 in the same broad sense in which Philo and ancient geographers used the term. In this sense the term would have included the entire vast desert region south and east of Palestine [both Arabia Deserta and Arabia Felix]. This use of the term might be narrowed further if Paul took into account the frequent use of the term to refer to the place from which incense and other products of the Arabian Peninsula were imported into Galatia. In this case ‘Arabia’ would refer specifically to Arabia Felix in Galatians 1:17.⁸⁷

The pertinent idea here is when Paul was referring to “Arabia,” in Galatians, it meant an area similar to the modern boundaries of Saudi Arabia. This is the case whether he was using a geographic term that would be understood by studied Jews in the context of the Old Testament, or if they were more familiar with Greco-Roman terminology.

B. The Testimony of Atlases

If one were to look through many Bible or secular atlases, one would find the term “Arabia” applied to various parts of the Sinai Peninsula in various time periods in history. ⁸⁸ The majority of the sources consulted however, do not have

⁸⁷ Kerkeslager, 179.

⁸⁸ Mary F. Hedlund and H.H. Rowley. eds. Atlas of the Early Christian World. (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1958) pp. 4-5. On page four it shows Arabia covering the entire Sinai Peninsula, but this was in AD 304. On page 5 it shows Arabia east of the Arabah and the Gulf of Aqaba. William L. Langer, ed. An Encyclopedia of World History. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968) Shows Arabia part of the Sinai Peninsula just before the Barbarian invasions – ca. 470A.D. Some atlases showed Arabia encroaching on the Sinai in 200 BC, 336 – 30 BC, with no explanation, while two showed Arabia in the Sinai in Paul’s day: Andrew Sherratt. Cambridge Encyclopedia of Archaeology (New York: Crown Publishers, 1980) 234. Peter Levi. Atlas of the Greek World. (New York: Facts On File Publishers, 1980). Grollenberg, Atlas of the Bible. 103, and map 26 – shows Nabatean Empire extending into the Sinai Peninsula in the Maccabean Period.

any part of the Sinai designated Arabia until many years after Paul's death. This would make Paul's reference to Mt. Sinai in Arabia even clearer in Galatians 4:25. Most maps displaying the time period before Paul's birth and during the time of Christ have the Nabateans reigning in Ammonite/Moabite territory to the north of Edom, and then south into the Midianite homeland east of the Gulf of Aqaba and on into the Sinai Peninsula, west of the Gulf of Aqaba. The earliest record referring to the Nabateans is in the fourth century B.C. They had expanded into Moabite territory by 312 BC. Notice the testimony of the Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible: "The problem of how to deal with Nabateans and their threat to Roman outposts was not solved effectively until the early 2nd century A.D., when Rome was able to organize the Nabatean territory into the Roman province of Arabia."⁸⁹ Again, another source comments: "In 106, possibly after Rabel's death [last Nabatean king], the Romans annexed the Nabatean kingdoms to the newly founded Provincia Arabia whose capitol was initially Petra, and later Bozrah."⁹⁰ The Oxford Bible Atlas shows the Nabatean kingdom well into the Sinai Peninsula in AD 6591 (Fig. 8).

So when Paul was writing to the Galatians, the Romans had not yet named the Sinai, "Arabia;" it was the territory of the Nabateans. In AD106, nearly forty years after Paul's death, the Sinai Peninsula became known as Arabia when it was annexed by Rome. These facts about the Nabateans and Rome's annexation are

⁸⁹ Wright and Filson, The Westminster Historical Atlas of the Bible, 64.

⁹⁰ Avraham Negev and Shimon Gibson, eds. Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land. New York: Continuum Publishers Group Inc., 2001) 358.

⁹¹ Herbert May, 89.



Fig. 8. Nabatean Kingdom. Herbert May, *Oxford Bible Atlas*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974) 89.

well established.⁹² After evaluating the evidence given in atlases, it is quite certain that when Paul used the term “Arabia,” with his first century Jewish readers in a Greco-Roman province, whether they considered the term in relation to the Old Testament or with regard to how things were in the world at that time, Arabia would have meant one place; the region we know today as southern Jordan and northwestern Saudi Arabia.

C. The Testimony of Ancient Historians and Scholars

1. Josephus (AD37 – 100)

There are a number of statements from the writings of Josephus that betray his understanding of the location of Arabia. The first can be found in *Antiquities* 5:1:21: “The lot of Simeon, which was the second, included that part of Idumaea which bordered upon Egypt and Arabia.” “At the distribution of the land of Canaan the extreme south of Canaan was assigned to this tribe.”⁹³ Idumaea was “the name used by the Greeks and Romans for the country of Edom.”⁹⁴ As mentioned above there is some debate on the location of Edom throughout the Old Testament period. In the post-Exilic period, the Edomites, due to the pressure of Nabatean Arabs, gradually pushed north, and finally occupied the southern half of Judea, including the region around Hebron which the Greeks later called South Judea, or

⁹² One may consult most Bible Dictionaries or Encyclopedias addressing the history of the Nabateans to confirm this fact. See also: Herbert May and Samuel Terrien, eds. *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3, (Nashville: Abington Press, 1962) 492. Harrison, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* p. 468. In the *New Harper’s Bible Dictionary* it says “As late as the 3rd century BC Nabateans were still nomads, holding the Sinai Peninsula...” 474. Madeleine Miller and Lane Miller, eds. *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1973)

⁹³ Merrill Tenney, *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975) 795.

⁹⁴ Miller and Miller, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*. 278.

Idumaea.⁹⁵ Josephus is speaking of the part of former Edom that reached up into the southern border of Israel, which was the land of Simeon originally shared with Judah.

This location, Simeon territory/ Idumaea, could not infer that the Sinai Peninsula is Arabia because Josephus says Arabia *and* Egypt bordered on it. His reference to Egypt couldn't refer to its homeland borders because the location of Simeon is well established. Therefore, it is obviously referring to the Sinai Peninsula over to the Brook of Egypt as Egypt and then Idumaea is the northern expansion of the Edomites referred to above that extended east to the Negev. Joshua 19:2-9, reveals that Simeon's allotment did not extend east of the Jordan rift, as it shared the territory of Judah. If Arabia is going to border the "Simeon section" of Idumaea, then from Josephus' statement, Arabia must have been in the area of modern-day Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

Josephus and the Apostle Paul were contemporaries as Paul lived from around AD 5-67, while Josephus lived from AD 37 – 100. Paul wrote Galatians between AD 48-53. Josephus was aware of the Roman mindset of the location of Arabia and the Jewish mindset. He was a historian and well educated. Paul was also well educated and a Roman citizen having a thorough knowledge of the Greco-Roman world. Certainly Josephus' opinion of the location of Arabia in that time period would have been representative of the opinion of any writer with a background like Paul, who was addressing either Jew or Gentile in the Galatian region. It is apparent that Josephus

⁹⁵ Miller and Miller, 149.

understood Arabia to include an area east of and south of Judea, and not into the Sinai Peninsula.⁹⁶

2. Philo of Alexandria

Another contemporary of Paul was Philo of Alexandria, Egypt who lived around 20 BC – AD 50. He was a Jewish scholar and philosopher. He defended the Jews against the policies of the Roman Emperor Caligula in AD 39 and wrote prolifically. His writings include commentaries on the Pentateuch, which are pertinent to this thesis. He provides clues to the proper identity of “Arabia” in the Greco-Roman understanding of the term. Philo was also a Greek philosopher and can help one understand popular beliefs of Hellenistic Jews of his day.

Insights into Philo’s concept of the borders of Arabia in the Roman world begin in his comments on the life of Joseph in *Joseph 1:15*:

Now it chanced that day that some merchants belonging to a caravan which was wont to carry wares from Arabia to Egypt were traveling that way. To these they sold their brother, after hauling him up, the leader in this plan being the fourth eldest brother.” Here of course Philo is describing the selling of Joseph into slavery from Genesis 37:25 – 36.

This passage reveals that these traders or merchants who were traveling from Arabia to Egypt were Ishmaelites or Midianites [the names seem to be used interchangeably]. The descendants of Ishmael and of Abraham through Keturah and Midian were so intermarried and such

⁹⁶ Josephus, 290.

seasoned travelers and traders; they were often considered synonymous groups. Also, the descendants of Ishmael listed in Genesis 25:12-18, list names that scholars have been able to trace to the region of Saudi Arabia/Jordan we (i.e., Kedar, Tema, and Dumah).⁹⁷ Therefore, when Philo describes caravans coming from Arabia to Egypt, the source of these caravans would not be the Sinai Peninsula. As noted earlier, southern Arabia (Felix) or what is known today as Yemen, was the source of gold, frankincense, and other valuable substances from the ancient world. Also, in Genesis 31:25, it describes the substances they were carrying, which the LXX translates, “incense products, resin, and myrrh.” “In Philo’s time one of the most important elements of the trade between Egypt and Arabia was the shipment to Egypt of aromatic products produced in the southern Arabian Peninsula.”⁹⁸

Philo’s concept of the Pauline term “Arabia,” then, must be influenced by the Greco-Roman practice of importing great quantities of goods from the region we know as Saudi Arabia. It would be reasonable for Philo to use “Arabia” in his commentary on Joseph because he knew of the ancient trading and trade routes of the Ishmaelites and Midianites.

Note again the comments of Kerkeslager:

Philo was using Arabia in the broad geographical sense to refer to both Arabia Felix and Arabia Deserta. This is the way the term was used by Strabo in his large extracts on Arabia

⁹⁷ Herbert May, *Oxford Bible Atlas*, 78-79.

⁹⁸ Kerkeslager, 167. Kerkeslager resources – Sidebotham, “*Ports of the Red Sea and the Arabia-India Trade*,” 209.

drawn from Eratosthenes, Agatharchides, and Artemidorus (who relied directly on Agatharchides). Eratosthenes and Agatharchides had been among the leading intellectual figures in Ptolemaic Alexandria. As a result their work played an extremely influential role in shaping the Alexandrian geographical traditions that provided an element in Philo's Greek education. The Sinai Peninsula did not play a major role in the considerations of Arabia in these authors or in any other Greco-Roman authors before the end of the first century. Usually the only places in the Sinai Peninsula that attracted any attention at all were the cities along the coast. The rest of the Sinai Peninsula appeared as vague *terra incognita* at the boundaries of Egypt and Arabia. Hellenistic and Roman political and commercial interests in Arabia were dominated far more by the areas of 'Arabia' east of the Sinai Peninsula from the Transjordan south into the Arabian Peninsula. Philo therefore probably did not have the Sinai peninsula in mind if he was using 'Arabia' in the manner in which the word was used in the Alexandrian geographical tradition.⁹⁹

As noted above, strict usage of the title "Arabia" for the Nabataean Sinai did not become "official" until AD 106 upon Rome's formal annexation of Nabatean territories. However, Philo didn't live close to the political situations of Judea and the Nabatean territory as Josephus did, so Philo and

⁹⁹ Kerkeslager, 163-164.

other Greco-Roman writers mention of Arabia would have had reference to the area of Arabia Felix, being a key trading partner. “Nothing suggests that Philo used ‘Arabia’ to refer to the Nabatean kingdom.”¹⁰⁰

The testimony of Scripture, Bible Atlases, and ancient scholars therefore, support the thesis that the Apostle Paul’s reference to “Arabia” in Galatians 4:25, is to be understood as a reference to the territory now known as Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

Essential to this thesis is to establish the basic modern boundaries of the Biblical locations of Midian and Arabia. Establishing these locations is, of course, necessary before one can give evidence for any specific mountain as a candidate for the Biblical Mt. Sinai. Evidence presented above not only places Midian in modern Saudi Arabia and Jordan, but it also excludes the traditional site in the Sinai Peninsula, and many other competing sites. The next section will begin to address evidence for a particular mountain in modern Saudi Arabia, Jabal al Lawz, as the Biblical Mt. Sinai.

V. Arguments Concerning Jabal al Lawz as the Biblical Mount Sinai

A. The Testimony of Ancient Scholars

1. Philo of Alexandria –(20 BC-AD 50)

It was established earlier that Philo’s concept of Arabia did not include the Sinai Peninsula, but rather the Arabia Deserta and Arabia Felix. Did Philo give some clue to the location of Mt. Sinai? Philo writes that Moses retired to *Arabia* after fleeing Egypt (Moses 1.47). Then he retells the account of Moses standing up for Jethro’s daughters, his subsequent marriage

¹⁰⁰ Kerkeslager, 166.

to Zipporah, his new shepherding responsibilities, and then his all-important experience at the Burning Bush (Exodus 2-3). All these events Philo believes took place somewhere in Arabia. Since the Burning Bush was at Sinai, this implies that Philo believed Mt. Sinai was in the Arabian Peninsula. After the Exodus, Philo says that Moses proposed to lead the Israelites to Canaan. Philo evidently felt that the three-day journey into the desert spoken of in Exodus 3:18, was referring to the time it would take Israel to reach the Promised Land via the most direct route. Some have proposed that this is indeed possible.¹⁰¹

Philo, following the Biblical narrative, brings the children of Israel to the borders of the land that they “propose to settle” (*Moses* 1.214), and then he says they fought the Phoenicians (*Moses* 1.214). This is a description of the battle with the Amalekites at Rhiphidim that took place before they arrived at Sinai (*Moses* 1.214-220). Philo believed that Israel had already traveled across the Sinai Peninsula to Palestine before Rhiphidim, and thus before they arrived at Sinai. Therefore one may conclude that Philo placed Mt. Sinai somewhere east of the Sinai Peninsula and south of the borders of Canaan. Thus Philo’s “geographic sequence,” puts Philo in agreement with Alexandrian tradition, especially the LXX placement of Mt. Sinai near the city of Madyan. Philo also tends to depend “heavily upon the LXX/OG in all his writings.”¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Kerkeslager, 168.

¹⁰² Ibid.

With these insights in mind, it is also significant that in *Moses 2.70*, Philo says, “for we read by God’s command he ascended an inaccessible and pathless mountain, the highest and most sacred in the region.” Therefore, if Philo did place Horeb near Madyan, as one who followed the LXX, then one could conclude Philo thought Jabal al Lawz was Mt. Sinai, since it is indeed the highest peak in the region.

2. Claudius Ptolemy (AD 100 –155)

The celebrated Roman astronomer, geographer, and chronicler of antiquity, was born in Egypt. His works were authoritative and used as textbooks for 1400 years. Ptolemy in his work *Geography* (c.a. 1460; 6.7,27) cites a *city* called Modiana, approximately 26 miles from the Gulf of Aqaba.¹⁰³ This city, with the location given on his map of this region (Fig. 9), seems to correspond with the Madian of Eusebius in *Onomasticon* (see below), and the Madian of Josephus who says in *Antiquities* (II.11. 1 & II. 12. 1) that it was a city which lay upon the Red Sea, where Moses was to live with Jethro. And near this city Moses would shepherd his flock at the mountain called Sinai, the highest of all the mountains thereabout. So, Ptolemy identifies this city of Midian, which was known by these ancients to be near the mountain of God, as a location east of the Gulf of Aqaba.

3. Origin (AD185 –254)

The testimony of the early Church Fathers is interesting as they seem to persist with the Jewish traditions of locating Mt. Sinai in northwestern

¹⁰³ For the proper reckoning of the distances given by Ptolemy in today’s terms, see footnote # 231 in Kerkeslager.

Arabia, rather than the official location that would become sanctioned by the Christian tolerant reign of Constantine (AD306-337).

However, before Constantine, Origin continues the Jewish tradition of “locating the ‘the city of Madiam’ (Madyan) in northwestern Arabia to the east of the Red Sea.” Consider his statement from antiquity: “And Abraham took another wife whose name was Ketura. And she bore him Zimran [Gen. 25:1-2]. From the children of Ketura were born many nations, which live in the Troglodyten desert, and Felix Arabia and beyond it – even the land of the Midians, and the city of Midian lying in the desert beyond Arabia in the region of Paran, to the east of the Red Sea. Accordingly the people of the Midianites are from Midian, the son of Abraham and Ketura [Genesis 25:2]. Thus as it has become henceforth well known, Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses had descended from Abraham, and Moses [became] kindred [of the Midianites].”¹⁰⁴ Once again Origin’s use of the phrase “city of Madiam” reflects his agreement with Jewish traditions and the LXX/OG.

Origin “was the greatest scholar of his age, and the most gifted, most industrious, and most cultivated of all the ante-Nicene fathers.”¹⁰⁵ His greatest service, according to Schaff, was in exegesis, as he was the father of the critical investigation of the Scripture, and his commentaries can still be useful to scholars for their, as Schaff puts it, “suggestiveness.”¹⁰⁶ His great defect was his tendency to find mystic meanings in the Scripture and not look

¹⁰⁴ Origin, “Selecta in Genesim.” *Patrologiae, Series Graeca*, Ed. J.P.Migne. Vol. 12, (Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1857), columns 119-120.

¹⁰⁵ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910) 790.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

at the grammatical and historical sense of the passages. Jerome said that Origin wrote more than any other man could read. Origin was also the first to lay down “a formal theory of interpretation, which he carried out in a long series of exegetical works remarkable for industry and ingenuity [....].”¹⁰⁷ Despite Origin’s legacy of an allegorical interpretation of Scripture, Christ being eternally generated from the Father, and some other views opposed by conservative scholars, Origins’ views on Biblical locations are trustworthy.

During the time of Origin, Christian hermits and monks mostly from Egypt, who had settled in the Southern Sinai, “made repeated efforts to identify the locality of the Exodus with actual places to which the believers could make their way as pilgrims.”¹⁰⁸ However, a site was not made official by “Christendom” until the fourth century AD under the reign of Constantine.¹⁰⁹

Origin held to the much older Jewish tradition of locating Madyan in northwestern Arabia to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba. Thus, this would suggest that he would have embraced the older Jewish tradition that Mt. Sinai is near the city of Maydan in northwestern Arabia.

There is an interesting reference in Eusebius to a statement by a contemporary of Origin called Dionusius of Alexandria. The statement is: “he fleeing into the Arabian mountain” (EH 6.42.3-4) There have been various

¹⁰⁷ Schaff, 520.

¹⁰⁸ Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler, *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Vol. 14. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1907) 1599.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

explanations given for this reference, but none can substantially link it to Jabal al Lawz. However, one cannot discount it completely as evidence.

4. Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 270–340)

One of the most widely studied Church Fathers is Eusebius. “He has as much right to the title of Father of Church History as Herodotus has the title Father of History.”¹¹⁰ Eusebius was a diligent and hardworking student, reading voraciously anything he could to help him in his research. He had access to the fine library at Caesarea and the imperial archives as he was “given a place of honor at the right hand of Constantine at the Council of Nicea [...]”¹¹¹

The work for which Eusebius is best known, and his greatest work, is Ecclesiastical History, which is a survey of the history of the church from apostolic times until AD 324. In this work Eusebius makes a great effort to be:

Honest and objective in his use of the best and most reliable of the primary sources that were available to him. In his critical use of many reliable documents Eusebius anticipated something of the careful scientific study which the modern historian does in evaluating the sources of his knowledge. It is little wonder that Eusebius is our best source of knowledge

¹¹⁰ Earle Cairns, Christianity Through the Centuries. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976) 153.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

concerning the history of the Church during the first three centuries of its existence...¹¹²

Schaff makes this statement: “Yet he [Eusebius] is neither a critical student nor an elegant writer of history, but only a diligent and learned collector.”¹¹³

One could be assured that Eusebius’ attempts to explain Biblical nomenclature by identification with contemporary place-names in his work Onomasticon, are reliable. There is another situation influencing Eusebius’ life that would make his conclusions about the location of Mt Sinai of greater conviction and of more careful scholarship. As mentioned above, Eusebius had a privileged relationship with the new “Christian Emperor” Constantine. Schaff makes these assessments:

He [Eusebius] was an amiable and pliant court-theologian,¹¹⁴ and suffered himself to be blinded and carried away by the splendor of the first Christian emperor, his patron and friend. Constantine took him often into his counsels, invited him to his table, related to him his vision of the cross, showed him the famous labarum, listened standing to his occasional sermons, wrote him several letters, and entrusted to him the supervision of the copies of the Bible for the use of the churches in Constantinople.

With this relationship in mind it is significant to notice the opinion of Constantine on the location of the Biblical Mt. Sinai. Constantine was a

¹¹² Cairns, 154.

¹¹³ Schaff, 876-77.

¹¹⁴ Schaff, 875-76.

known mystic. His vision of the cross became his rallying cry to conquer for Christianity. Did he live by true Christian conduct?

Though the vision may have occurred, it is likely that Constantine's favoritism to the Church was a matter of expediency. The Church might serve as a new center of unity and save classical culture and the Empire. The fact that he delayed baptism till shortly before his death and kept the position of *Pontifex Maximus*, chief priest of the pagan state religion, would seem to support this view. Moreover, his execution of the young men who might have had a claim to his throne was not in keeping with the conduct of a sincere Christian. Perhaps there was a mixture of superstition and expediency in his policy.¹¹⁵

Indeed there was plenty of the mystical and superstitious in Constantine's reign. Constantine had a long history of dreams and visions. Starting in the year AD 312, they had become a regular part of the emperor's life. His mother was Helena, the daughter of an innkeeper and the first wife of Constantine's father Constianus. Helena was a discreet and devout woman, greatly loved by her son. She also shared with her son the tendency for the mystical and superstitious.

The selection for the site of Mt. Sinai probably occurred about the same time that Constantine sent his mother to the Middle East to discover the places he had seen in his vision and to build a church at the supposed place of

¹¹⁵ Cairns, Christianity Through the Centuries. 134.

Christ's resurrection in Jerusalem. The identification of these holy sites in the Middle East was the result of an atoning action by Constantine for the deaths of his wife and son Crispus at his own command.¹¹⁶ It was in this depressed state that Constantine sent Helena to the Holy Land to discover these sites. The Sinai Peninsula was one of the places she visited. "The origin of the present Monastery of Saint Catherine on the NW slope of Jebel Musa is traced back to A.D. 527 when Emperor Justinian established it on the site where Helena, mother of Constantine has erected a small church two centuries earlier."¹¹⁷ We know that Helena's efforts were "liberally supported by her son, in whose arms she died at Nicomedia in 327."¹¹⁸

With all this in mind, it would seem that Eusebius' opinion on the location of the Biblical Mt. Sinai might be strongly influenced by the emperor. A recent writer in an archaeological periodical seems to have made the conclusion that Eusebius placed Mt. Sinai in the southern Sinai Peninsula.¹¹⁹ It is not likely he had these circumstances in mind when expressing that position, rather he may have agreed with the presumptions of British scholar C.I. Davis on this issue. Whatever his reasons for his position he does not footnote his findings.

Actually, Eusebius did have his own opinion on the whereabouts of the sacred mountain, which once again demonstrated the Christian adoption of the Jewish tradition of placing Mt. Sinai in northwestern Arabia. Eusebius

¹¹⁶George Buttrick, ed. *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962) 376.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. Vol. III. 467.

¹¹⁹ Gordon Franz, *Is Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia?* *Bible and Spade* 13.4 Fall. 2000: 101

wrote what Schaff calls “a description of the places mentioned in the Bible,”¹²⁰ or “a sort of sacred geography,”¹²¹ called Onomasticon. C. I. Davies attempts to dismiss Eusebius’ clear reference to Mt. Sinai being near Maydan east of the Red Sea, as not an attempt on Eusebius’ part to locate a site in his day, but rather “a reference to Biblical nomenclature such as often appears in the Onomasticon.”¹²² Actually Eusebius was trying to demonstrate Biblical nomenclature by identifying with contemporary locations. In Onomasticon, Eusebius writes: “Midiam. A city named thus from the sons of Abraham from Keturah...And it is across Arabia toward the south in the desert of the Saracens, toward the east of the Red Sea.”¹²³ Eusebius is attempting to describe the location of the “Madiam” mentioned in his Bible [which included the LXX/OG], and the area of the Saracens is not very specific unless one accepts the testimony of Ptolemy regarding their location.¹²⁴ However, when he says Madiam is a polis east of the Red Sea, then he uses the same spelling Josephus used when he described the city of Maydan in northwestern Arabia (Antiquities 2.257). Demonstrating that he is referencing a contemporary place/site he says “But there is another city, whose name sounds the same, near Arnonis and Areopolis, *of which now only*

¹²⁰ Schaff, History of the Christian Church. Vol. III. 877.

¹²¹ Schaff, 879.

¹²² Davies, Way of the Wilderness. 32-33.

¹²³ Erich Klostermann, Eusebius Werke: III Band 1. Hälfte: Das Onomastikon der Biblischen Ortsnamen. GCS (Leipzig 1904) 125.

¹²⁴ Claudius Ptolemy, Geography of Claudius Ptolemy. Trans. Edward Stevenson. New York: The New York Public Library, 1932) 6.7.21; 6.7.27. *Courtesy of Special Collections Department of Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University*. It seems that Ptolemy puts the “Saracens” in the same immediate area as “Madiama.”

the ruins are evident (emphasis added).” Clearly Eusebius is attempting to localize different cities past and future with contemporary place-names.

In the Onomasticon Eusebius says the following about Mt. Horeb: “The mountain of God in the region of Midian *next to Mount Sinai* (emphasis added) beyond Arabia in the desert [...]”¹²⁵ He explains the use of both names [Horeb and Sinai] for the same mountain in Scripture, by proposing that they are two separate mountains juxtaposed. Jerome however, after his translation of this verse from Greek says: “But to me it seems that the same mountain is called by two names, sometimes Sinai, sometimes Horeb.”¹²⁶

On page 124, in Klostermann’s work, Eusebius says the city of Midiam is *επεκεινυ* Arabia which means “on the far side” of or “across.” Then on page 173, Eusebius says that Horeb is in the region of Midiam next to Mt Sinai *υπερ* Arabia in the desert. This Greek word can mean above or “beyond.” For Eusebius to say Madyan or Horeb is across or beyond Arabia does not make sense due to the fact that Arabia usually included all of the Arabian Peninsula.

What did Eusebius mean by the terms, across and beyond Arabia? A lengthy quote from G.W. Bowersock in his work Roman Arabia will clarify this point:

Once the Persian wars of this period were over, it was possible for Diocletian to devote himself directly to the administrative reorganization of the eastern provinces. No later than 314, the

¹²⁵ Klostermann, Das Onomastikon der Biblischen Ortsnamen, 173.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

lower part of the Trajanic Province of Arabia, south of the Wadi Hasa, has been detached from the north with its capitol at Bostra. This lower segment, which included Petra, the Negev, and probably the Hejaz, became part of Palestine and was therefore associated with the provinces that lay on the western bank of the Jordan. In works dated to 311 and 313, Eusebius declared that the governor of Palestine sentenced Christians to labor in the copper mines at Phaeno “in Palestine.” This place, to the south of the Dead Sea, had certainly been a part of the old Arabian province but, at least by the time of Eusebius’ writing, was evidently reckoned in Palestine. The whole southern part of Arabia, on both sides of the Araba, became known as Palaestina Tertia by the mid-fourth century.”¹²⁷

If Eusebius was referring to this Roman province of Arabia, which had been cut off to the south, then it would be reasonable for him to use these geographic terms while sitting in Caesarea. Also, the words “across Arabia” would not support those in favor of the traditional site for Mt. Sinai. If all of the Sinai Peninsula were regarded as Arabia at that time [which it wasn’t], then it would not make sense to place Horeb beyond Arabia. Even if it were regarded as Nabatea or Egypt [which it was not], any location in the Sinai Peninsula would not be across or beyond the province of Arabia.

Furthermore, Eusebius’ reference of the nearness of Horeb to Madiam would

¹²⁷ G.W Bowersock, Roman Arabia. (Cambridge, 1983) 143-44.

place it closer to this city than any location in the Sinai Peninsula. Also, it has been established above that the descendants of Ishmael moved generally into the area of what is northwestern Arabia. Eusebius says “and in the desert of Paran, Scripture mentions that Ishmael lived. Accordingly also [the people who are called] Ishmaelites are now called Saracens.”¹²⁸ This then would place Mt. Sinai in what is now northwestern Saudi Arabia and not the southern Sinai Peninsula.

Eusebius could have developed his beliefs about Mt. Sinai’s location in northwestern Arabia from Origin, using the LXX/OG, Philo, Josephus, or any number of sources with the great library at his disposal in Caesarea.

5. Jerome (AD 340-420)

Jerome was a Bible translator, commentator, and scholar. “His scholarship embraced the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages and literature; while even Augustine has but imperfect knowledge of the Greek, and none at all of the Hebrew. Jerome was familiar with the Latin classics, especially with Cicero, Virgil, and Horace.”¹²⁹ In AD 386, Jerome went to live in Bethlehem and began his greatest work, a translation of the Bible into Latin known as the Vulgate. The Western Church has used this version for centuries and until modern times it was the only Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. Once again, the views of Jerome would seem significant, considering the traditions for Mt. Sinai in the southern Sinai were strengthening within

¹²⁸ Klostermann, 167.

¹²⁹ Schaff, Vol. III, 969.

the various monastic communities in that area.¹³⁰ What were the views of this Biblical scholar?

Late in the fourth century, Jerome translated Eusebius' Onomasticon into Latin. Jerome diligently translates Eusebius and makes comments and notes from here and there without any intention to contradict this view. Actually in Jerome's translation of the term *χωροβ*, or Horeb, he gives the following translation and then a comment of his own: "The mountain of God in the region of Midian next to Sinai beyond Arabia in the desert, where the mountain and the desert of the Saracens, which is called Paran, meet. *But to me it seems that the same mountain is called by two names, sometimes Sinai, sometimes Horeb.*"¹³¹ [emphasis added – the words of Jerome]. As noted above, Eusebius places Madiam the city east of the Red Sea, which by the connection with the LXX/OG spelling of Madiam, and its connection with the place-name, means the location east of the Gulf of Aqaba. In Jerome's translation he freely makes comments and notes on the writings of Eusebius. In the case of Horeb, he disagrees with Eusebius and expresses his belief that the two names refer to one mountain, not two separate mountains. At this point, or with any of the other references referring to Mt. Sinai, Jerome could have expressed his opinion on its whereabouts if it differed from those of Eusebius, but he did not. Jerome also comments in a footnote: "Paran is near the Mount Sinai."¹³² He makes no effort to clarify that it is in a location different than Eusebius had established. With a rival tradition [Jebel Musa in

¹³⁰ Kerkeslager, 199. See footnote for Solzbacher, Monche, Pilger, and Sarazenen, 75-166.

¹³¹ Klostermann, 173.

¹³² Klostermann, 167.

the southern Sinai] on the rise, certainly such a prominent writer, scholar, and theologian would have made some reference to this other tradition if indeed it were a view of substance. The older tradition of placing Mt. Sinai near the city of Maydan evidently remained strong in Christian circles until the time of the Arab conquest and for sometime after. Islam also testifies to this tradition.

B. The Testimony of Islam

Mohammed the prophet of Islam lived ca. AD 570- 632. Islam was organized in 622 and began its rise. The tradition of locating mountain Sinai near the city of Maydan persisted in the Islamic era. In Mohammed's time there is only one mention of the town of Madyan (in Ibn Ishak), when he sent an expedition there under Aayd b. Haritha.¹³³ Around A.D. 700 several Islamic sources make mention of some Christian monks, ascetics, and hermits in Madyan on this major pilgrimage route.¹³⁴ The poet Kuthayyir 'Azza or Kutejjer, did much journeying along the route up the Wadi 'I Qura to Syria and Egypt. In one of his poems he writes, "The anchorites of Madyan and those whom I have frequented will weep for fear of eternal punishment, kneeling on the ground."¹³⁵ Another poetic line from a contemporary of Kuthayyir, "Jarir," writes this line: "If the anchorites of Madyan were to see you, they would come down, and also the old mountain goats who live on the peaks of the mountains."¹³⁶ It is possible that these monks were

¹³³ F. Buhl. and C E. Bosworth, "Madyan Shu 'ayb," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. C. Bosworth *et al.* (Leiden 1986), 5. 1155-56.

¹³⁴ C.E Bosworth, "Madyan Shu 'ayb in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Lore and History," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 29.1 Spring (1984): 64.

¹³⁵ Bosworth, 62.

¹³⁶ Bosworth, 63.

one of the sources that passed the tradition on to Islamic sources which would continue to associate Moses and Mt. Sinai with the city of Madyan. It would be the Islamic sources that would pass on the tradition that Maydan was the home of Moses and Jethro.

Musil mentions a source that records various things about Madyan. He said that the town at that time, (early 900's) is about six days march from Tebuk, and it is larger than Tebuk, and contains a well from which *Moses watered the flocks of Su'ejb* (emphasis added).¹³⁷ Musil goes on to say that Madjan originally was the name of the tribe to which belonged Su'ejb's fellow countrymen, who asserted that they were descended from Madjan (Midian), the son of Abraham. Musil mentions several other Islamic sources that associate this town by the Gulf of Kolzum [Aqaba] with Moses and the prophet Su'ejb.¹³⁸

Who is this prophet "Su'ejb" or "Shu'ayb?" The Qur'an states that Shu'ayb lived in the city of Madyan in the pre-Mosaic period and was closely associated with Moses.¹³⁹ The verse from 7.85 states: "To the Madyan people we sent Shu'ayb, one of their own brethren." Here the Qur'an associates a city with a people as the other sources mentioned above. Then, in Surah 20.40, it says that Moses stayed with Midian, and in 28:20ff it reviews the Biblical account of Moses standing up for the daughters of the elder of Madyan. According to Buhl and Bosworth this "Shu'yab" was later identified as the father-in-law of

¹³⁷ Alois Musil, *The Northern Hegaz: A Topographical Itinerary*, (New York: American Geographical Society Oriental Explorations and Studies 1, 1926) 280-181.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Qur'an 7.83-91; 11.85-98; 29.35-36

Moses.¹⁴⁰ However, the legends of this prophet in the Qur'an have no Old Testament authority, and actually Qur'an commentators reject the association.¹⁴¹

As noted earlier, Islamic sources from ca. AD 900 tell us that the city of Maydan contained the well of Moses from which he watered the flocks of Shu'yab. Philby, Musil, and Bosworth all testify that these traditions continue unbroken into modern times.¹⁴² There also remains a persistent Islamic tradition that locates Mt. Sinai near Maydan.¹⁴³ In Alois Musil's work he says this:

In the oasis of al-Bed we found four settlements. The most ancient one seemed to me to be al Malkata; the next oldest, the settlement to the south of Hawra; and the most recent, al-Malha and al-Birg. Hawra is certainly of Nabataean origin. According to the Arabic and classical authors, this oasis is identical with the ancient Madian, the Madjan of the Arabic authorities"¹⁴⁴ (Fig. 10).

On modern maps of Saudi Arabia, "al Bad" is still on the main highway (Hwy. 5) following the coastal area of the Hijaz going north toward Jordan, Israel and Egypt (Fig.11). There is still a large oasis at the site, and as recently as the late 1980's, locals associate the oasis with Moses and the Mountain of Moses with the highest mountain in the area, Jabal al Lawz.¹⁴⁵

C. The Testimony of Modern Archaeology

¹⁴⁰ Buhl and Bosworth, 1156.

¹⁴¹ Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, ed. The Holy Qur'an Text, Translation and Commentary, Revised. (Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Corp., 1989) 368.

¹⁴² Philby, Land of Midian, 211-16; Musil, Northern Hegaz, 109-118; Bosworth, Madyan Shu'ayb in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Lore and History, 53-64.

¹⁴³ Kerkeslager, 200. See footnote.

¹⁴⁴ Musil, 120.

¹⁴⁵ Larry Williams, The Mount Sinai Myth. (New York: Wynwood Press, 1990) Notes under photo # 17.

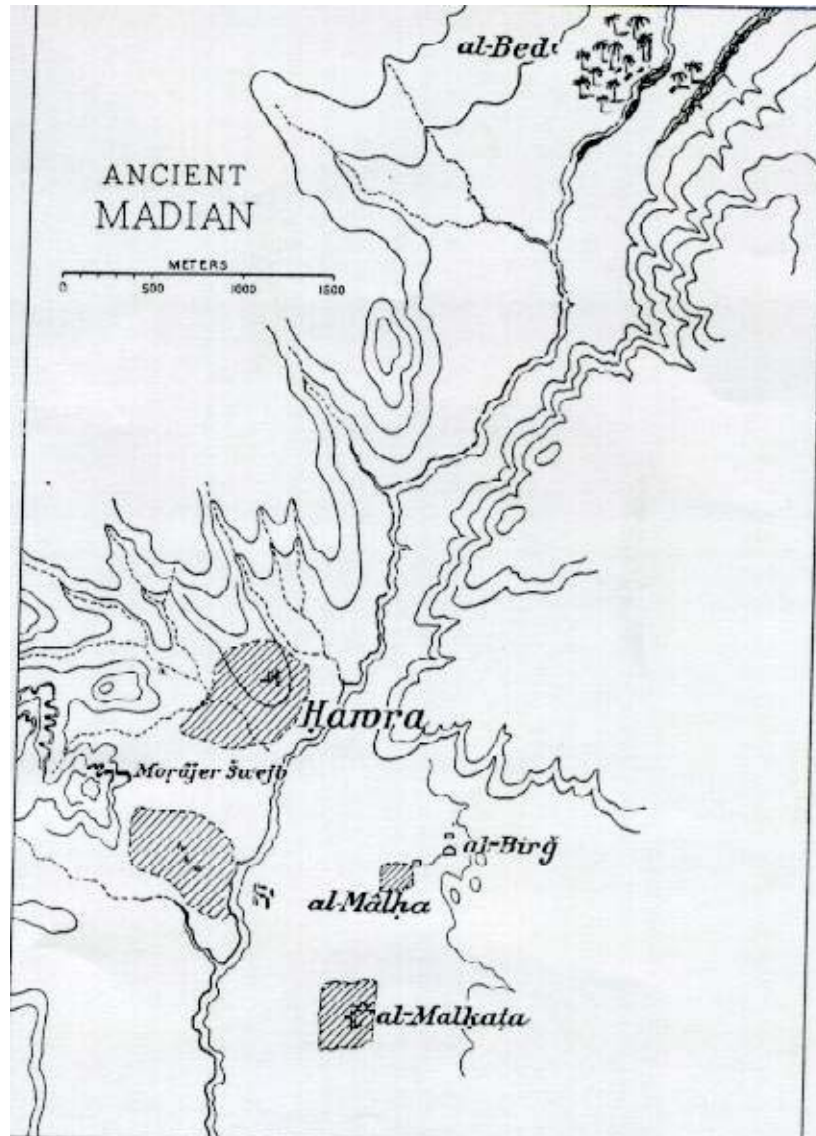


Fig.10. Environs of al Bad. Alois Musil, The Northern Hegaz. (New York: American Geographical Society. 1926) 110.



Fig. 11. Modern Map of Northwest Hejaz. Saudi Arabia. Map (Reading, England, Geoprojects, 1995).

Jabal al Lawz was not implied as Mt. Sinai by name until the modern period. Josephus stated that Mt. Sinai was the highest peak in the area around Madiam, which would be Jabal al Lawz. In the modern period several scholar/archaeologists have referred to it by name and implied it as a candidate for the most holy of mountains. In this section, the testimony of prominent scholars and archaeologists will be presented, who are sympathetic with a Saudi Arabian location for Mt. Sinai. Also, the presence of rock art, structures, and various topographical distinctives will also be considered as possible evidence that Jabal al Lawz may be the Biblical Mt. Sinai. If one were considering candidates for Mt. Sinai in the whole region including the Sinai Peninsula and northwestern Saudi Arabia, one would have to stop and take a long look at Jabal al Lawz. Information has been trickling in about this area and specifically this mountain for the last couple decades. If one were to compare what an archaeologist would have to sort through at Jabal al Lawz and the immediate vicinity, verses the traditional site, there would be no comparison. In the upcoming pages, a varied list of structures, rock art, inscriptions, geologic phenomenon, trees, a graveyard and a cave will be investigated. Few other sites in question bear evidence of so much ancient activity. Various opinions of what these evidences reveal will be discussed. Opinions will be presented by both those in favor and against the “Sinai in Arabia” theory. It seems that advocates of each view have polarized, without much objectivity. A book containing a site survey and excavation of the area, published by the Deputy of Antiquities and Museums for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, will be consulted in this paper, especially

concerning the section on ancient structures. One would expect it to be an objective analysis of the al Bad area and Jabal al Lawz.¹⁴⁶

It is the intention of this thesis to be as objective as possible with the conclusions of this work. There is concern that Islamic archaeologists, who may be hesitant to give evidence to reveal a “Jewish Holy Site” within its borders, can operate objectively with possible pressure from the Department of Antiquities to force some conclusions that would only support a Muslim viewpoint on history.¹⁴⁷ There is also the “human difficulty” of sorting out subtle bias that lingers in one’s mind as one examines evidence, especially when one holds a theory with great earnestness.

In addition, archaeology involves some guesswork.¹⁴⁸ Dating rock art for example, has some room for debate.¹⁴⁹ However, even though archaeology can be guesswork at times, archaeologists can at times be reasonable certain about the date of an item, or the identification of an artifact or an ancient structure. Also,

¹⁴⁶ Gordon Franz, Is Mount Sinai In Saudi Arabia, 111.

¹⁴⁷ Due to the sensitivity of this information, the source cannot be quoted, but there is *documentation* that the Saudi Department of Antiquities destroyed a site that was not compliant with *Islamic history*. Therefore, in this writer’s mind, there is some concern about the objectivity of the excavation/survey of al Bad and al Lawz areas, by the Saudi D.O.A.

¹⁴⁸ Recently P. Kyle McCarter, professor of Biblical Studies at Johns Hopkins University said of an inscription found on an ancient ossuary linked to James the brother of Jesus Christ: “the inscription ‘most likely’ means a blood brother relationship but is ‘only suggestive’ that it means the Jesus from the Bible. We may never be absolutely certain... *but in the work we do, we are rarely absolutely certain about anything.*” Kevin Eckstrom, “Scholars Say Ancient Bone Box Linked to Jesus.” The Christian Index. 7 Nov. 2002. It is assumed that McCarter is speaking of archaeology.

¹⁴⁹ A. Livingstone, *et al.*, “Epigraphic Survey, 1404-1984,” Atlatl vol. 9. II (1985): 128-144. On page 132, Livingstone relates what he calls “a new puzzle.” Speaking of the bovine rock sketches in the vicinity of Jabal al Lawz, he said one sketch has a Thamudic inscription with it. The flat hump, forward-projecting-horns cattle were more likely not present in the region during the first century BC when the climate was extremely dry and hot. Thamudic (Bedouin Script – Khan) writing is from the first century BC. As Livingstone puts it “This means that either the cattle were carved as a cult animal even though they were not present, or that the dating of Thamudic is subject to review.” Actually, in another study, M. Khan, Recent Rock Art and Epigraphic Investigations in Saudi Arabia, Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies, 1991, 113-118, makes the conclusion that Thamudic script is from ca. 1200 B. C. to 800 B.C., and that it came from peoples inside Arabia, not outside. Therefore, there is some uncertainty in dating petroglyphs.

one only has to produce some possible errors in various conclusions to give room for other interpretations. It is the *complete* body of evidence in this thesis that will, as Kerkeslager put it regarding Jabal al Lawz, make it “the most attractive hypothesis available.”¹⁵⁰ Also, though it is very difficult to correlate the Biblical place-name with its present equivalent, archaeological evidence will be considered for sites that would be significant in supporting the idea of Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia.

In this section various natural features and structures will be presented as items that are described in the Biblical account and one would expect them to be there. For instance the “Split Rock of Horeb,” one would expect to be in the vicinity of Sinai/Horeb. It may have been something very easy to locate or it could be very obscure. It may have succumbed to a natural event that erased its distinctiveness. Thus, just because the traditional site does not have an individual feature such as this Split Rock does not necessarily prove it is not the Biblical site. However, with the valid possibilities present at Jabel el Lawz, they build support for the site.

The maps illustrating the immediate vicinity of Jabal al Lawz and the surrounding area can be seen in Figs.12 & 13.

1. Prominent Modern Scholars and Archeologists

The following testimonies of prominent archeologists and scholars are varied. Each supports a Saudi Arabian location for Mt. Sinai. None have specifically named Jabal al Lawz as the mountain in question. Actually, some are opposed to the idea. However, in reading their arguments for a Midian

¹⁵⁰ Kerkeslager, 213.



Fig. 12. Vicinity of Jebel el Lawz. Lennart Moller, The Exodus Case. (Copenhagen: Scandinavia Publishing House, 2000 127. R.F Burton's Map After the first detailed investigation of the land of Midian (1878).

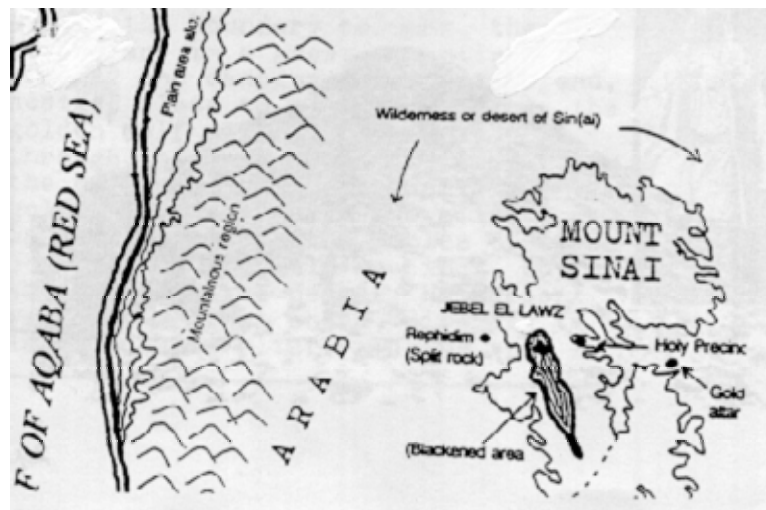


Fig. 13. Vicinity of Jebel el Lawz. Jonathan Gray, Sinai's Exciting Secrets. 22.

location for Horeb, support can be found for Jabal al Lawz. The comments of these men will be kept in context, yet, as they offer arguments to oppose a southern Sinai Peninsula location for Horeb, for example, then points can be made for an Arabian location. Some of these men suggest sites in Saudi Arabia, quite close to Jabal al Lawz, which of course would narrow the overall geographic parameters for the mountain considerably. Even though some of the specific information that is now available about Jabal al Lawz was not known at the time these men wrote, their insights will still be very helpful to this paper. As this section is developed, archaeological evidence specific to Jabal Al Lawz, that may or may not have been observed by these early modern investigators, will be considered for evidence in support of Jabal al Lawz. Information will be drawn from their arguments that can support this thesis. This will involve summarizing their arguments and then determining what information is significant to imply the possibility of Mt. Horeb standing in the vicinity of modern day Al Bad. In some instances, the untenable views of some of these men, who are quoted to support the Sinai in Saudi Arabia view, will be pointed out, so the position may rest on sound evidence and reasoning.

a. Charles Beke (1800-1874)

Charles Beke was an English explorer and author. He mapped great portions of the country of Ethiopia in the mid-1840's, and determined the approximate course of the Blue Nile. Among his published works were his Discoveries of Sinai in Arabia and of Midian, and a

controversial pamphlet entitled: Mount Sinai a Volcano. Beke surmised by observing texts like Judges 5:4-5 that Mt. Sinai was a volcano, i.e. “The earth trembled and the heavens poured, The clouds also poured water; the mountains gushed before the LORD, the Sinai, before the LORD God of Israel.” However, this does not force a volcano interpretation. Exodus 19:18 says the mountain was completely in smoke *because* the **LORD** descended upon it. His presence is what caused the earth to shake and smoke to rise. Surrounding mountains may have gushed forth from the violent shaking of the LORD on Sinai, but it does not require Sinai itself to be a volcano. There are volcanoes in the region, but not in the immediate vicinity of Jabal al Lawz. However, His presence there may have triggered these distant volcanoes. Also, with all the disturbance the Lord brought by His presence on the mountain, it seems there would have been some distinct meteorological effects. If indeed the mountain were flowing with lava and ash, this would have forbidden Moses’ ascent, and complicated the presence of Israel all around its base. Alois Musil had similar reasoning.¹⁵¹

Thus, to prove his theory, Beke went to the Sinai Peninsula to identify a volcanic peak that might be Mt. Sinai. He did not find anything volcanic in the vicinity of the traditional site, Jebel Musa, or any other mountain in the Peninsula, so he returned to England. This point would also not disprove that Mt. Sinai was in the Sinai Peninsula, if volcanism is not an issue. Beke then decided to investigate Arabia. All along the

¹⁵¹ Musil, The Northern Hegaz, 298.

western side of the Arabian Peninsula there are ash and lava fields called the *Harra*. This led Beke to investigate the region and eventually name a mountain, Mt. Baggir, as Mt. Sinai; and Mt. Ertowa, as Mt. Horeb, situated beside Mt. Baggir.¹⁵²

It has been noted above that the presence of evidence for volcanic activity in the northern Hegaz, is not necessarily evidence that Mt. Sinai stands there. Actually, as noted, Jabal al Lawz is not a volcano and the Harra does not run into the Lawz- Maqla range specifically. (Fig.14) Beke agreed that Josephus placed the true mountain of God in the vicinity of ancient Madiam, which is known to be east of the Gulf of Aqaba. At this point and in many others, Beke conclusions can be seen to support the view proposed in this thesis.

Though proponents of Sinai in Midian quote Beke for support, some of his views do not line up with Scripture and with other points he has made. Beke felt that the “Mitzraim” of the Israelites is not Egypt, and that the LXX/OG and other translations incorrectly translated the Genesis 13:1 passage which says that Abraham “went up out of Egypt,” which is Mitzraim in the Hebrew. Charles Beke held to many of the views of this paper, yet his reasoning is untenable in several areas, including the volcano hypothesis, the Mitzraim theory, and yet another theory that Korah was swallowed up due to a fissure resulting from the effects of volcanic activity, yet this incident did not take place near Sinai, but near Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran.

¹⁵² Har-el, *The Sinai Journeys*, 248, 252.

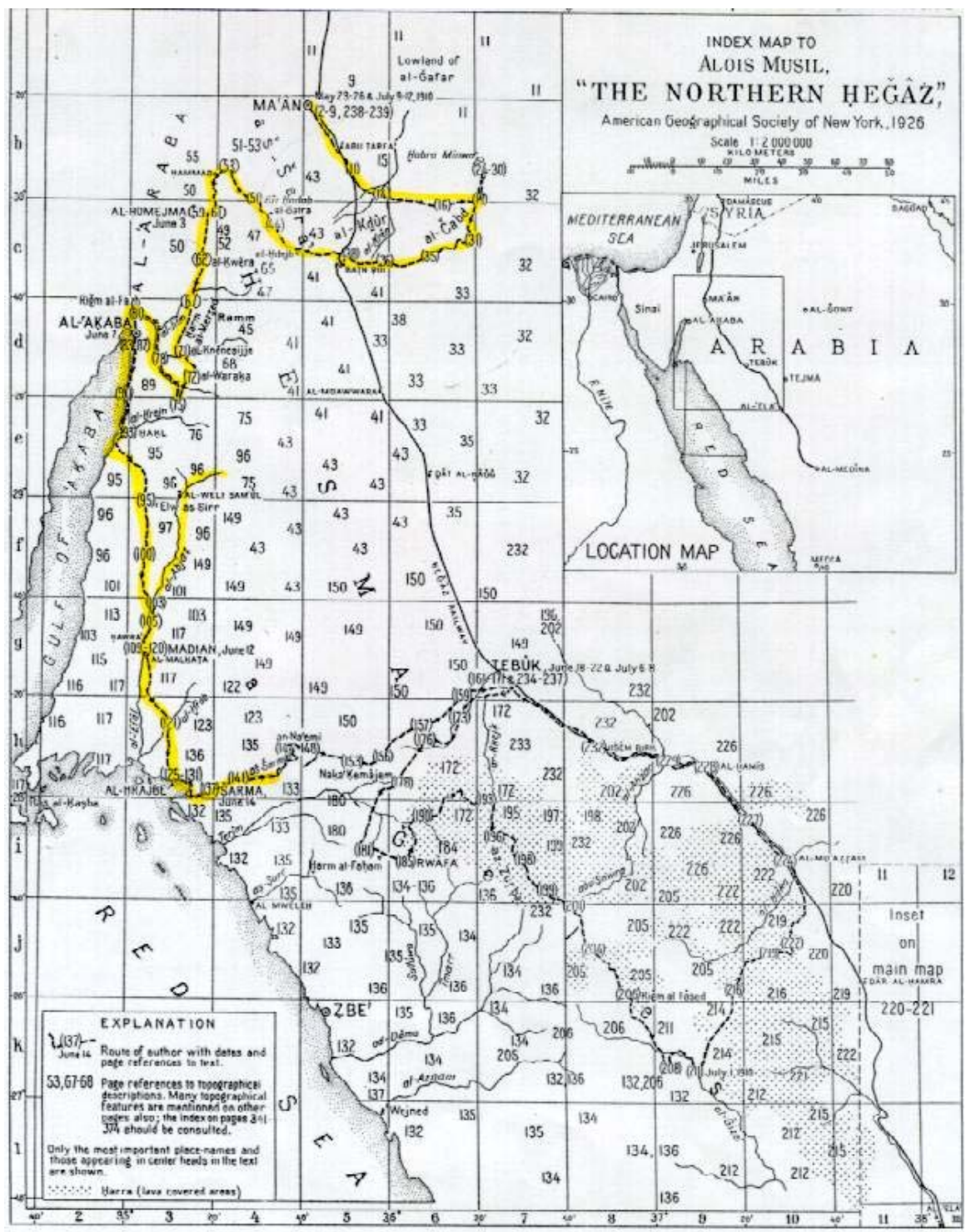


Fig. 14. The Hesma Map. Alois Musil, The Northern Hejaz. (New York: American Geographical Society, 1926) [Partial highlighting by C. Whittaker]

Although Beke is seen as a “friend” of the “Horeb in Saudi Arabia view,” some of his points of reason are not helpful in establishing the thesis of this paper.

b. Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890)

Burton was an English explorer, writer, and linguist. He had a thorough knowledge of five languages as he traveled all over the world. On one of his journeys, he was attempting to find the source of the Nile, and he got as far as Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania. His most famous journey was his trip to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia in 1853. As a result of his trip, Burton wrote Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Mecca. In 1878 he published a book called The Gold Mines of Midian. This book described a continuation of Burton’s pilgrimage to Medina and Mecca where Burton passes through Midian and documents what he sees. He also investigated the mining towns of Arabia, tracing the streams of wealth to their hidden sources as he searched for gold.

Though Burton speculates that Midian could have extended across the Gulf of Aqaba, and even as far as the Suez,¹⁵³ he seems to contradict himself by saying the Sinai Peninsula belonged to Egypt as early as the sixth dynasty, and supplied her with noble metals.¹⁵⁴ It has been established above that this Egyptian influence continued into Moses’ time and the Exodus, and that Midian and Egypt would not have shared the same territory at that time. Actually, if one takes into consideration the

¹⁵³ Richard F. Burton, The Gold Mines of Midian, (New York: Dover Publishing, 1995) 189.

¹⁵⁴ Burton, 178.

remarks of Josephus regarding Mt. Sinai being the highest peak near the ancient Midian capitol of Midiam (Arabic-Madyan), then Burton's statements about Madyan would support this thesis.

Burton says the land of Midian is still (1877) known to its inhabitants as "Arz Madyan." He quotes Josephus: (Antiquities 2.11): "Moses [...]when he came to the city Midian, which lay upon the Red Sea," and he says Midian city and country have the same name, which he calls a common practice in that part of the East.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, when it says in Exodus 18:27, that Jethro was sent back *to his own country* and in Numbers 10:29-31 that Hobab decided to return to *his own land* (Midian) this could have meant the *city* of Midian or Midiam or Madyan in what is now Saudi Arabia, which would be close to Jabal al Lawz.

Burton also said the Medieval Arab geographers called Midian "Madyan."¹⁵⁶ With these observations it would stand to reason that Burton may have placed Mt. Sinai in ancient Midian to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba. He also quotes Eusebius saying that he assigns Rephidim and Horeb to Pharan, and the mountain of God to the Land of Midian.¹⁵⁷

Though Burton did not specify Jabal al Lawz as Mt. Sinai, he also does not support the traditional site and leaves room in his writings to conclude that he favored a Saudi Arabian location.

c. Charles Doughty (1843 -1926)

¹⁵⁵ Burton, 177.

¹⁵⁶ Burton, 178.

¹⁵⁷ Burton, 187.

Doughty was an English author and explorer. He is best known for his book Travels in the Arabian Deserta (1888), where he describes his life among the Bedouins. It is considered a masterpiece of travel literature and did not become popular until it was republished in 1921.

From traveling among the Arabs, Doughty writes of “a tradition amongst their ancestors [Bedouins in Midian] that very anciently they occupied all that country about Maan, where also Moses fed the flocks of Jethro the Prophet....”¹⁵⁸ Also, in Antiquities, Book II.11.2., Josephus says: “These virgins, who took care of their father’s flocks, which sort of work it was customary and very familiar for women to do in the country of the Troglodytes.” So Josephus calls the inhabitants of Midian around Madyan Troglodytes. According to Keyser, the publisher of Doughty’s book made the following statement: “Mr. Doughty found the Troglodyte cities to be sandstone cliffs with the funeral monuments sculptured in them of an antique town, and like those which are seen in the Valley of Moses or Petra.”¹⁵⁹ Evidently these “funeral monuments” spoken of are referring to the “Caves of Moses,” or the Nabatean tombs Musil noted around the ancient town of Madain. Doughty says it this way in his book:

¹⁵⁸ Charles M. Doughty, Travel in Arabia Deserta. (New York: Random House, 1921) 130. This book could not be found to resource. This quote came from an unpublished booklet compiled and circulated by Jonathan Gray. The booklet is called *Sinai’s Exciting Secrets*. In the first section of the booklet, Gray includes a section by John D. Keyser, in which we find the above quote. He does however footnote the quote from Doughty. A copy of this booklet may be received by writing Jonathan Gray, P.O. Box 3370, Rundle Mall, ADELAIDE Sth Australia, 5000.

¹⁵⁹ Jonathan Gray, ed., Keyser, 7.

“the Medain is the Syrian caravaner’s name for the hewn monuments in the crags of El-Hejr on the Haj road, six removes north of Mediana...”¹⁶⁰

Thus, Doughty also complies with the ancient tradition of locating the Midian people (Troglodytes) in the location of modern day Al Bad. Mr. Doughty’s publisher doubtless knew Doughty’s mind on these matters, indicating Doughty’s agreement with Josephus that Moses kept his flocks near modern day al Bad. He may have then agreed with Josephus that Sinai was the highest peak in the area of Midiam (al Bad), which is Jabal al Lawz. However, Doughty did not state this conclusion.

Once again, this explorer, scholar did not identify a particular mountain as the true Mt. Sinai in his famous work, yet, from what he observed, wrote, and concluded, one could make a case that Jabal al Lawz could be implicated from the evidence.

d. Alois Musil (1868 –1944)

Musil explored over a prolonged period of time the Biblical Negev, Edom, Moab, and the classical Arabia Petraea (1896 –98 and 1900- 02). He was investigating the topography and ethnology of these areas. After 1908, he conducted extensive explorations in northern Arabia. In 1910, he conducted field investigations to establish the location of the Biblical Mount Sinai, as well as the route of the Exodus and the camping grounds of the Midianite and Ishmaelite tribes.

Musil was the Professor of Oriental Studies on the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University in Prague. He published eight volumes of

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

travel books, maps of Arabia Petraea, and his book The Northern Hegaz, in 1926.

On May 23, 1910, Alois Musil began his travels through the Northern Hegaz, at the town of Ma'an (Fig.14). He moved south through what is now southern Jordan to the town on the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, al Akaba. He then followed close to the shore for a number of miles before moving eastward inland in the se'ib of as-Seraf and down to the Wadi of al- Abjaz where Musil encountered al Bed (al Bad) and the ancient remains of Madian on June 12, 1910.

This is of course a part of the ancient trade route that came up from Yemen, and other Hegaz locations that brought gold, and frankincense, and myrrh to Egypt and other northern destinations. It was also later to be the pilgrim route for Muslims going to Mecca.

Therefore, whatever lies on this route was well established and known in the ancient world. Any historian of any stature would be acquainted with the oasis, pilgrim stops, towns, and historical points of interest along this trade route. On this route is the city of Madian, [Madian, or Madyan]¹⁶¹ which has a long history of connection with the Midianite people, the father-in-law of Moses (Jethro or Reuel), and Moses, as established above.

Musil continues the copious notes of his expedition by noticing from a distance the "range of Lowz" (Jabal al Lawz) with this distinction: "far on the northeastern horizon, rises the purple mountain range of Lowz

¹⁶¹ Musil, The Northern Hegaz, 106-107.

and to the south of it the half white and half black mountains of al-Makla, and ar-Raha.” Here is Musil’s first mention of the mountain which is the highest peak in the vicinity of Madian, which Josephus intimated was Mt. Sinai. (Antiquities II.12.1) However, Musil actually places the location of Mt. Sinai around fifty kilometers south of Jabal al Lawz by the se’ib of al-Horb.¹⁶²

Here, Musil departs from Josephus’ testimony, as al-Horb is not the highest peak in the vicinity of Madyan. Some of his modern locations for ancient places such as Kadesh, Elim, and Rephidim will be discussed later, but, he does mount evidence in corroboration with other ancients, including some listed above to make the conclusion: “According to all our sources of information, Horeb was situated in the land of Midian.”¹⁶³

Musil has given his opinion concerning the route Israel took from Egypt, and the feasibility of Mt. Sinai being 450 km from Egypt. He also discusses the Deuteronomy 1:2 passage and how his location for Mt. Sinai fits into that passage. Later in this paper, the routes and various distances between Egypt and Jabal al Lawz and between many other key places will be discussed to determine the feasibility of the Jabal al Lawz location in relation to the testimony of the Bible.

It has been established above that ancient Midian is east of the Gulf of Aqaba, and that Jethro and Hobab were not returning from Sinai to a different country other than Midian, but were returning to their city of

¹⁶² Musil, 269.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

dwelling, their land of habitation, which would have been about fifteen-twenty miles, which to some is a days journey. Musil adds to the opinion that Midian was to the south of Edom:

The evidence in all the foregoing records, therefore shows that we are justified in locating the camping places of the tribes descended from Abraham by Keturah to the south of the Edom range of Se'ir, or the modern as-Sera, and to the west of the sandy desert of Nefud. It is there that Flavius Josephus, *Archaeologia*, II, 257, locates the place Midiana; Ptolemy, *Geography*, VI, 7:27, the settlement of Madiama; Eusebius, *Onomasticon* (Klostermann), p.124, the town of Madiam; and the Arabic tradition the center of the Madjan tribe.¹⁶⁴

Other observations by Musil on his expedition pertinent to this study include the tombs found in the necropolis of Morajer Su'ejb. These tombs are just south of the oasis of al-Bed and the ruins of Hawra in ancient Madian. Amateur archaeologists and explorers Larry Williams and Bob Cornuke in 1988-89 encountered a local who made the statement: "The prophet Musa has always been a part of this region's history. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, pitched his tents near this oasis. In fact, we have found markings and writings in those caves that tell us Jethro and Moses' wife, Zipporah, were buried in tombs in the hillside."¹⁶⁵ Cornuke had

¹⁶⁴ Musil, 296.

¹⁶⁵ Cornuke and Halbrook, *The Mountain of God*. 99.

mused as he observed the hills honeycombed with caves, “I had a hard time picturing the heroic Moses rearing his family here. Would God’s prophet hole up in these cramped caves those forty years of exile, tending Jethro’s sheep?”¹⁶⁶

Musil’s opinion, as well as many others, is that these were not dwellings but tombs. In an effort to get some insight into the origin and purpose of the caves, in his travels through Madian, Musil:

Crawled from tomb to tomb, searching for inscriptions, but I did not find a single one. They had been carved out in the soft limestone walls, which had crumbled and vanished. But the walls of several tombs had received thick coating of firm mortar, and in about five tombs I came upon insignificant traces of Nabataean inscriptions written in black upon this coating of roughcast. Even of these, however, not a single letter had been completely preserved.”¹⁶⁷

Musil has thirteen photos or drawings of these tombs in his book. Thus, the testimony of the local encountered by Cornuke is in question. It seems best to regard these caves from the Nabataen Period long after Moses, as the Nabataens lived in this region in the first century A.D. The Nabataen capitol, Petra, with similar carved facings in rock, is only around 120 miles to the north.

¹⁶⁶ Cornuke and Halbrook, 102.

¹⁶⁷ Musil, 112.

Musil said he found four settlements in Madian, all south of the oasis of al-Bed. Some of the ruins were sixteenth century pilgrim stations and some were purely Nabataen. However, the overall site he identifies with the ancient site of the home of Jethro.

Once again the testimony of Alois Musil does not pinpoint Jabal al Lawz as Sinai, however, his findings from his expeditions in general favor a Saudi Arabian location for Mt. Sinai, with Musil's version of the mountain only 50km to the south. Information gleaned from Midian supports the arguments already presented above, and add further proof of the ancient nature of Madian's claims.

e. Harry St. John Philby (1885-1960)

Philby was a British explorer, official, and author. He joined the British Foreign Service in 1917, and was sent on a special mission to Arabia. He became the first European to visit the southern provinces of the Nejd. He traveled Arabia extensively, devoting the greater part of his life to Saudi Arabia. For around thirty years he was an advisor to King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia. He became dissatisfied with British policy in the Middle East and so in 1930 he resigned from his foreign work and became a Muslim. His Muslim name was Hajj Abdullah.

He wrote several books, one of which is called The Land Midian. It was first published in 1957. He journeyed in the Hegaz or Hijaz between 1950 and 1953, using Musil's maps, and "saw more of the Hijaz than Doughty, Burton, Wallen and Eating and Huber, Janssen, and Savignac,

Musil and Carruthers put together [...] He saw it by automobile instead of camel or railway.”¹⁶⁸

Again, Philby does not identify Jabal al Lawz as Mt. Sinai. He considers Musil’s site, but does not consider it seriously as he could not find any archaeological evidence to support it as Mt. Sinai. One writer, commenting on Philby’s notes gives the impression that Musil’s candidate for Mt. Sinai, al Manifa at Wadi Horb, 50 kilometers south of Jabal al Lawz, is one in the same as the twin peaks of Lawz, but this is not the case.¹⁶⁹

It is not necessary to imply Philby says something when he does not, for much that he observed is helpful for this thesis. There is no question for Philby that Midian is in Saudi Arabia, along the Gulf of Aqaba: “There is nothing extravagant in the assumption that the many points of vantage along the river [Wadi Afal near the Lawz range] leading to their main centers farther south were occupied by ancient Midians (and their successors, including the Nabataeans)”¹⁷⁰ Philby mentions Jabal al Lawz on a number of occasions, as to its prominence. He thought he saw snow on the peak at one time¹⁷¹ On at least two occasions he refers to the granite slopes or peaks of Lawz. He also refers to al Maq’la which is the sister or twin peak of Lawz, with its “basalt cap,” or a “basalt pyramid.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ John Philby, The Land of Midian. (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1957) 4.

¹⁶⁹ Keyser, 16.

¹⁷⁰ Philby, 206.

¹⁷¹ Philby, 209.

¹⁷² Philby, 210, 215. Both Philby and Musil speak of the black top of Maq’la. Musil calls it the half white half black mountain of al Maq’la (107). The importance of this unusual “black top” of Maq’la will be dealt with later in the section covering the archeology of the site. At this point it is important to note that

He evidently, as Musil, did not consider Josephus' observations about Mt. Sinai being the tallest peak in the area around Madiam. Indeed, Philby noted the prominence of the Lawz range, as he viewed it moving south down the ancient trade route, Abyadh –Wadi Afal toward al Bad.

Regarding al Bad or the site of ancient Midian, Philby made this statement, "It was astonishing that my companions [Musil and Burton] all of whom have passed through Bad 'a before on their way between Tabuk and Dhaba, had never taken the trouble to visit the scenes of Jethro's activities, celebrated in the Quran, let alone the traditional sites connected with Moses."¹⁷³ Philby seems convinced that this indeed was Midian, was the home of Jethro, and thus had the resulting connections to Moses.

Philby agreed with Musil that the caves of Moses south of al Bed were Nabataean, created more than 1500 years after Jethro's time. However, Philby, again referring to the Quran, says it "preserves no memory of the Nabataean regime, while retaining the tradition of a much more ancient stage of history, for which no archaeological evidence has

following a conversation with Jim and Penny Caldwell, residents of Saudi Arabia for 12 years and frequent visitors to this site, that they agree with Musil and Philby in identifying the sheer granite slopes with al Lawz and the blackened cap mountain with al Maq'la, which are just across the valley from each other [about two miles between peaks]. They also feel that al Lawz would be Horeb and al Maq'la would be Sinai. This information was received in a telephone conference on March 24, 2002. The Caldwell's have much photographic [about 1000 pictures] and video [about 30 hours] documentation of their explorations and discoveries. They are not scientists or geologists, but astute observers, who have consulted experts in making many of their conclusions. Western archeologists or geologists may never be allowed on the site. Over an eight-year period the Caldwell's visited the site of Jabal al Lawz 14 times. I have visited their home and observed their fastidious documentation and copious notes and feel they are likely the best informed Westerners on this site. So, both Philby and Musil note the distinctiveness of al Maq'la in their day. Of course Philby was not a geologist, yet he does speak about neighboring peaks as having basalt dykes and seams and caps, and how he encountered "beautiful outcrops and hillocks with clear cut red and black patterns made by the rhyolite and andesita dykes in the basic grey granite of the most ancient strata," p. 209, as if he has some understanding of the geologic diversity of the area. Yet neither of them did a close up examination of the site or the rock at the top of al Maq'la.

¹⁷³ Philby, 212.

been forth coming.”¹⁷⁴ Philby finds that fact “curious.”¹⁷⁵ Philby does speculate about a well in the vicinity that has a campsite surrounding it strewn with relics such as bits of pots and beads. He thinks the organizers of ancient pilgrimages passed off this well as the well where Moses defended the daughters of Jethro. Actually, a theory like this put forth by a much earlier inhabitant of the area may have had some reliability.

As noted above, Musil located Mt. Sinai approximately 50km south of Jabal al Lawz in the Wadi Hrob, which he and Philby both thought may have been a preservation of the name Horeb.¹⁷⁶ Philby said the mountain was smooth; double-headed granite and was a candidate for the identity of Mt. Sinai.¹⁷⁷ Later however, Philby visited this mountain at the Wadi Hrob and searched the valley for any inscriptions. He found none. He makes the following conclusion: “If Hurab has any secrets to yield, it certainly didn’t yield them to me; and it scarcely can be hoped that any evidence of the visit of Moses and the Israelites to this spot will ever be forthcoming.”¹⁷⁸

St. John Philby, along with the other four men presented above, represent scholarly eyewitnesses of the region of Jabal al Lawz, and constitute significant evidence to implicate the region of Jabal al Lawz as

¹⁷⁴ Philby, 213.

¹⁷⁵ Philby evidently felt the Quran was somewhat reliable historically, as he eventually became a Muslim. His curiosity that the Quran did not mention the Nabataeans and yet maintains the older tradition despite no archaeological evidence for the latter is understandable. It may be that Mohammed’s chronicle of religious history did not deem the Nabataeans significant. Yet, on the other hand, there has not been enough archaeological investigation in the area to reveal the settlement of Jethro’s day, or that there was such a Bedouin existence there in Jethro’s day. It may have all perished.

¹⁷⁶ Philby, 222.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Philby, 223-4.

that of the Biblical Mt. Horeb, and with the witness of Josephus and other ancients, implicate Jabal al Lawz specifically. In the next section various physical evidence on and around Jabal al Lawz will be considered.

2. The Testimony of Rock Art

It would stand to reason that the genuine Mt. Sinai would perhaps have in its surrounding environs *some* physical evidence that nearly two million people camped there for approximately nine months time. Jabal al Lawz is located in extreme northwest Saudi Arabia around 32 miles from the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba and around twenty miles east of the modern village of al Bad. This site has some interesting features in its environs that would correlate with the Biblical narrative. The Saudi Arabian government has fenced in various sections of the site, with a notice stating that it is an official archaeological site.¹⁷⁹

In this section the evidence of rock art in the vicinity of the mountain will be noted. According to several sources, there are several groups of rock drawings or etchings in the close vicinity of the mountain.¹⁸⁰ According to the Saudi Deputy of Antiquities and Museums, “a large number of human and animal figures, ancient and early Islamic (Kufic) inscriptions were located from the area particularly on land around Jibal Hisma and Jabal al-

¹⁷⁹ According to the Saudi’s they fenced in this important archaeological site because of the vandalism of several sites in the area and in the Kingdom in general. Abdul-Rahman al-Tayyib al- Ansary, Al-Bid ‘ History and Archaeology. (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Deputy of Antiquities and Museums, 2002), 61

¹⁸⁰ Robert Cornuke and David Halbrook, The Mountain of God. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000) p. 63; Larry Williams, The Mount Sinai Myth. (New York: Wynwood Press, 1990) 103-110; Mary Nell Wyatt, “Mount Sinai,” Sinai’s Exciting Secrets. comp. Jonathan Gray. (Davenport Fl.: Anchor Stone Int., 2001), 69-70; Viveka Ponten, The Exodus Revealed, videotape, Discovery Media Productions, 2001. David Fasold is also an eyewitness of this area and had some pictures confiscated by the Saudi Arabian government. *Jim and Penny Caldwell took most of the pictures presented by Mary Nell Wright.*

Lawz area.”¹⁸¹ The Saudi’s document some of these rock art sites in their book. Actually in the area south of Jabal al-Lawz up to Umm Haifa, “sixty nine rock art sites were registered.”¹⁸² Several westerners, Jim and Penny Caldwell, Ron Wyatt (now deceased), David Fasold, Bob Cornuke, Larry Williams, and Viveka Ponten of Sweden, have been eyewitnesses of Jabal al Lawz and the surrounding area. By far, the Caldwells have had the most exposure to the site. Their efforts have brought forth photographs of the petroglyphs and many of the other archaeological findings of the area (Fig.15). In a plain about 3km from the base of Jabal al Lawz there is, what has been proposed to be, a man-made rock altar site. On the “altar” there are according to Mary Nell Wyatt, “twelve groups of petroglyphs representing the Egyptian bull god Apis, and cow goddess, Hathor.”¹⁸³ Also according to Williams, Wyatt, and the Caldwells, there are many other collections of petroglyphs in the immediate vicinity. There are drawings depicting “cows and bulls, a camel, long- horned goats, a sheep, a snake, several cats, and possibly a wolf which a man with a bow and an arrow is about to shoot”(Fig.16).¹⁸⁴ For some, the fact that there were depictions of cattle was of more significance than most other things. The nomads in the Syro-Arabian desert raised camels, sheep and goats, mainly for their milk and wool, so they would have rarely eaten meat from their herds. Therefore, Arabian nomads

¹⁸¹ Al Ansary, *Al Bid ‘ History and Archaeology*. 47.

¹⁸² Ibid. Actually in the al-Bad “region,” as the Saudi’s refer to it there are over 1600 petroglyphs registered. Al-Ansary, 47.

¹⁸³ Wyatt, 69.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 70 According to Wyatt, there were 9 cows, 4 with their horns depicted like the Apis bull on the large altar, and 5 cows with there horns curved forward. A man is carrying one calf, as if it perhaps fell in a crevice or caught in some brush.



Fig. 15. Petroglyphs at Lawz. Lennart Moller, *The Exodus Case*. (Copenhagen: Scandinavia Publishing House, 2000) 263. Fig. 488. [Photos taken by Jim and Penny Caldwell] Petroglyphs are etched on the “Golden Calf Altar Site” at the foot of el Makla.



Fig. 16. More Rock Art at Lawz. Photographed by Jim and Penny Caldwell in the plain below the Lawz range.

most certainly supplemented their diet by hunting, an activity that is captured in rock drawings all over the Syro-Arabian desert.¹⁸⁵ According to Wyatt, “the designs on the cattle are pure Egyptian. And the presence of dogs and cats is really no surprise as they are frequently depicted in the wall scenes of ancient Egyptian tombs.”¹⁸⁶

Has there been a professional archaeologist to look at the site and make conclusions? According to Larry Williams, there was an archaeologist from the University of Riyadh who testified: “These drawings are the Hathor and Apis bull from Egypt – I have never seen them in this country before.”¹⁸⁷ Livingstone noted that the rock art in the Jabal al Lawz area is dominated by cattle and that “the bovines were of the distinct type with the head shown in profile from the side.”¹⁸⁸ This does not prove they are Egyptian, but to Wyatt it lends evidence to their uniqueness, and thus the possibility that they were imported [i.e. by the Hebrews in the time of Moses].

Williams develops several lines of reasoning in his theory that these bovine sketches are evidence that this was the Altar of the Golden Calf of Exodus 32. One of the strongest arguments is that some of the sketches seem to depict the worship of a calf because a human figure seems to be holding a calf over his head¹⁸⁹ (Fig. 16). However, if this site was exclusive to the worship of the god Apis, then why is there an ibex carved on the rock near

¹⁸⁵ M.C.A. MacDonald, “North Arabia in the First Millennium BCE,” Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, ed. Jack M. Sasson (4 vols. New York 1995) 2. 1358.

¹⁸⁶ Wyatt, 70.

¹⁸⁷ Williams, 103-110.

¹⁸⁸ Livingstone, Epigraphic Survey, 132. The presence of bovine petroglyphs is mainly concentrated in the northwest Hejaz of Saudi Arabia, with one area in the southwest near Bir Hima, called the Aiduma hills.

¹⁸⁹ Williams, See picture of this image in photo number 13.

the etching of the bovine?¹⁹⁰ The “daily life” rock art in Fig. 16, in the immediate vicinity of the alleged altar site also includes a cross-section of animals. Thus, Wyatt, Cornuke, and Williams feel that the concentration of bovine petroglyphs around Jabal al Lawz and especially on this large concentration of boulders in an open plain at the foot of Jabal al Lawz constitute significant evidence that this site is perhaps the Golden Calf Altar site.

While these arguments seem at first pass seem quite conclusive, there are other arguments to consider. Franz observes that Exodus 32:5 says that Aaron built the altar himself, questioning how a single man could move the huge boulders into place to make this altar.¹⁹¹ Cornuke speculates upon seeing the huge pile of seemingly human-stacked boulders, that this may have been assembled by thousands of very able Hebrew workers who had a lot of experience in Egypt.¹⁹² Williams makes the following point, accommodating the idea that the site may have been too large to be man-made: “Perhaps the mound of rocks is a natural formation and some type of altar was placed on top of this rock pile, which could be another possible way of using the site as an altar.”¹⁹³ Williams’ proposal of Aaron possibly building the altar on top of the rock pile is interesting, since in Exodus 32:19 it says that when Moses was at the foot of the mountain and only near the

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., See photo 12.

¹⁹¹ Gordon Franz, “Is Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia,” *Bible and Spade*, 13. 4 Fall. (2000): 109-110. Also, Gordon Franz, “Mt. Sinai is Not at Jabel el-Lawz in Saudi Arabia,” *Lambert Dolphin’s Page* 15 Nov. 2001 <<http://www.ldolphin.org/franz-ellawz.html>>. 5.

¹⁹² Cornuke, *The Mountain of God*, 65.

¹⁹³ Williams, 105.

camp, he could see the calf.¹⁹⁴ If this is the site of this scene in Exodus 32, then for Moses to see the calf a quarter of a mile away above the masses, one could imagine the height of these boulders would aid his vision (Fig.17). Also, there is ample room on top of this rock outcropping to build a personal altar and set the golden calf.

However, there are other parts of this puzzle one must solve before concluding that this is indeed a real possibility for the location of the Altar of the Golden Calf. The fact that it is in an open area would help its candidacy, as it would lend itself to large crowds of worshippers around it. However, the key discovery that put this site in question is the bovine petroglyphs.

In evaluating these bovine etchings, several questions must be considered objectively. If these sketches represent the work of the Hebrew worshippers of the Golden Calf, then it would stand to reason that they would depict the Egyptian gods of Apis or Hathor or another sacred bull. As noted above, Ron Wyatt and David Fasold claim that a Saudi archaeologist said these were Egyptian style cows and bulls. And, that they had never been found anywhere else in Saudi Arabia.¹⁹⁵ This Saudi archaeologist, according to Williams' sources, who represented the state at David Fasold's trial for trespassing in the area, said he had never before seen this type of bovine art

¹⁹⁴ Most often it is clear in Scripture when an *individual* sets up an altar because there is no one else around to aid in the construction as in the case with Abraham in Genesis 22:9 [and yet Isaac could have helped here] and Gideon in Judges 6:26. However, in Exodus 40 the Lord speaks to Moses and told *him* to set up the Tabernacle "on the first day." Then all through the chapter it says Moses "erected the court" and "hung the veil," obviously not by himself. This was probably the case in Exodus 24:4, where Moses at around eighty years old gets up one morning and builds an altar and twelve pillars. It is unlikely he did this without the assistance of the "young men of the sons of Israel" (Exodus 24:5).

¹⁹⁵ Williams, 210-211. Actually, Ron Wyatt said the archaeologist said the drawings were Egyptian "ruminations" of Apis and Hathor. Therefore, he felt they were not exact copies of the Apis.



Fig. 17. Golden Calf Altar. Bob Cornuke, The Mountain of God. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000)

in the country.¹⁹⁶ Franz scoffs at the idea that any Saudi archaeologist would say this.¹⁹⁷

It is important here to examine the work of Dr. Nayeem who provides photographs of bovine art from different areas of Saudi Arabia. Bovine art is definitely not unique to the area around Jabal al Lawz. In Nayeem's work, Prehistory and Protohistory of the Arabian Peninsula, he divides Arabia into thirteen archeological divisions. He presents photographs of bovines from Section Three, which includes Jabal al Lawz, at Kilwa, Khaybar, and Hanakiya, which he calls the Northwestern region. He also presents photos from Bir Hima in Section Six, which he calls the Southwestern region. Upon visual comparison of the Lawz etchings, and several etchings from regions mentioned above, plus depictions of Egyptian Apis bulls (Figs.15&18), one can see similarities between all three, and yet the cows at al Lawz are not greatly distinctive from those in other parts of Saudi Arabia. One exception is the Jubba Style bovine (Fig. 19) whose horns and heads are seen as from the top, while the al Lawz cows are in profile as most others. At Hanakiya near Medina, a patched bovine is carved with its head and horns turned into plain view, which Nayeem thought to be "most unusual."¹⁹⁸ In many cases the bovine's sides are patched.¹⁹⁹

In five different depictions of the Egyptian Sacred Bulls, the horns were curved upward in a semi-circle, with some indistinct "patching" on the

¹⁹⁶ Willaims, 106.

¹⁹⁷ Franz, *Is Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia?* 109.

¹⁹⁸ Mohammed Abdul Nayeem, Prehistory and Protohistory of the Arabian Peninsula. (Hyderabad, India: Hyderabad Publishers, 1990) 95.

¹⁹⁹ A. Livingstone, Epigraphic Survey. 132.



Fig. 18. Bovine from S.W. Region. Mohammed Abdul Nayeem, Prehistory and Protohistory of the Arabian Peninsula. (Hyderabad, India: Hyderabad Publishers, 1990) 112. Below: Apis Bull. Anita Stratos, "Divine Cults of the Sacred Bulls, <<http://touregypt.net/features/bull.htm>.



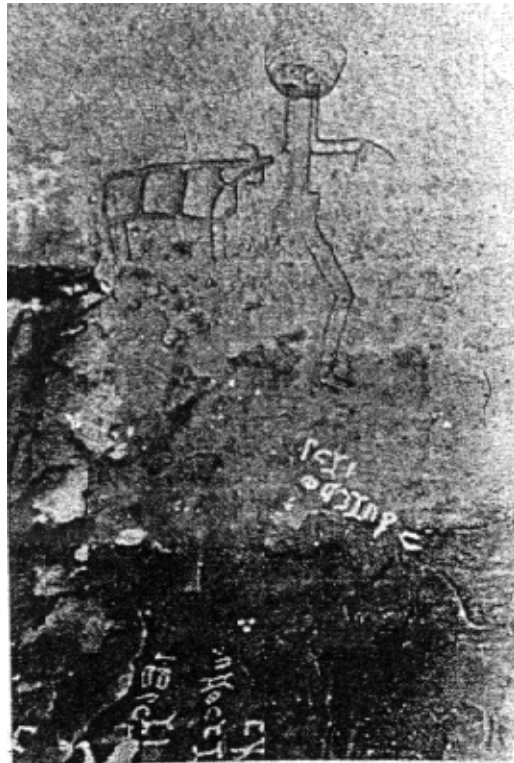


Fig. 19. Bovid with turned head.
Muhammed Abdul Nayeem, Prehistory
And Protohistory of the Arabian Peninsula.
218.

sides of some of the bulls.²⁰⁰ Williams' observing the horns on the alleged altar site says: "Note that the horns have the spiraling effect that one so often sees in the horn of the Apis, or Hathor, cows in Egyptian inscriptions."²⁰¹ In Egyptian hieroglyphics the bulls' horns are actually more arched upward and inward than spiraled or bent like those on the Lawz site. The horns at the Lawz site are generally longer and are either curved out at the top or spiraled. *However, all the bovine etchings in Saudi Arabia could have a general likeness to the Apis bull.* Therefore, one must give convincing evidence that the bulls on the Lawz site are the cultic bull, distinguishing them from all others, if one is to distinguish this site as anything other than a Bedouin rock art billboard showing drawings of cattle. *Actually there are quite different looking cattle on the same boulder site.*²⁰²

Here it would be appropriate to interject the conclusions of the Deputy Ministry of Antiquities from Saudi Arabia: "There is no doubt that the animal representations at the foot of Jabal al- Lawz and its surroundings were part of the overall cultural tradition. However, there is no correlation between the cattle figures located on and near Jabal al-Lawz and those worshipped in Egypt during Moses' time is to say during the thirteenth century BC. The figures of cattle located on Jabal al-Lawz and in the Tabuk area have absolutely no similarity to the Apis and Hathor bull worshipped in Egypt

²⁰⁰ Anita Stratos, [Egypt: Divine Cults of the Sacred Bulls](http://touregypt.net/featurestories/bull.htm), 10 Feb. 2002
<<http://touregypt.net/featurestories/bull.htm>>

²⁰¹ Williams, 106.

²⁰² Williams, photos 12 and 14.

during the Pharaonic period.”²⁰³ A thorough perusal of depictions of Apis and Hathor, would indeed present similarities. This strong statement seems to indicate an intention to distance oneself from the Mosaic connection at all costs.

Therefore, it can be acknowledged that there are some general similarities between the bovines of Lawz and the sacred bulls of Egypt. However, does this mean that the Hebrews were here with Moses in the Late Bronze Age, and this was the Golden Calf Altar site? If one pinpoints this site as *the* altar site, due to the type of bovine etched there, then the Hebrews also had many other Apis bull altar sites, far beyond the Biblical coordinates. The cows from the Aiduma hills [southwest region of Nayeem’s map] actually look most like the Apis bulls of Egypt (Fig.18) There is only one “Golden Calf” incident like this is Scripture, and for Israel to make bovine carvings before or after this event, would be foolish to consider, as it would constitute idolatry. If the Jews were just trying out their artwork, they likely would not draw a prominent god of Egypt.

Another question to consider is whether these etchings would have survived from the encampment. We know Moses destroyed the Golden Calf itself, it would stand to reason in his zeal, that he would have ordered the defacing of these petroglyphs immediately as they would continually be potential stumbling blocks to Israel in the months they remained at Sinai

²⁰³ Al-Ansary, 78.

(Exodus 32:20).²⁰⁴ Around 20 miles from Jabal al Lawz, in the area of al Bad, there are more bovine rock art sites.²⁰⁵ One might argue that Israel carved these as they were moving through this area toward Lawz, but for the same reason discussed above, this view is untenable.

Cornuke has made the observation that it is peculiar that bovine petroglyphs would be in an area that is not conducive for cattle; rather that it is sheep country.²⁰⁶ According to the Saudi's, "it is misleading to say that there were no cattle in Arabia before the Exodus."²⁰⁷ The Saudi's date the cattle petroglyphs earlier or later than the Exodus, as will be pointed out later. In Cornuke's view and others, these cattle were brought in from the outside. Williams also makes the point that cattle were not ever indigenous to the area. Williams' cites French scholar Jean Koenig. Koenig believes that Mt. Sinai is also in Saudi Arabia. However, Koenig believes it is a different mountain than Jabal al Lawz. Part of his thesis is supported by a number of etchings found on a mountain 110 miles south of Jabal al Lawz. However, these drawings, Williams points out, have no bovines. Rather there were camels, people riding camels, camel caravans, large birds, all in stick figures.²⁰⁸ These drawings are very typical of this region, as the camel became essential to the transportation of the lucrative commodities of that region. Notice MacDonald's comments here:

²⁰⁴ In discussions with the Caldwells, and upon viewing the "altar area," there seems to be places on the rocks where some defacing took place. Also, there are no bovine drawings on the rocks facing toward the "holy precinct" at the foot of the eastern side of al Maqla. Was this an attempt of Moses to deface some of the petroglyphs?

²⁰⁵ Franz, Mt. Sinai Is Not At Jabal al-Lawz In Saudi Arabia. 5.

²⁰⁶ Cornuke, 66.

²⁰⁷ Al-Ansary, 80.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 108

Large numbers of camels were needed to transport these luxury goods to the lucrative markets to the north. [The myrrh, frankincense, and other aromatics came up from Arabia Felix, which is present-day Yemen, moving toward Egypt, Mesopotamian nations and eventually the Mediterranean world.] The nomads who bred the camels had a double hold on this trade. They could provide the means of transport, guides, and security for the caravans; but they were also well placed to raid them if the merchants did not pay ‘protection money’ or tolls. These nomads and the inhabitants of the oases on the commercial routes thus established very early an indispensable and extremely profitable role in what was without a doubt the richest trade in the Near East.²⁰⁹

Williams therefore feels there was nothing unusual in the etchings around Koenig’s mountain to distinguish it as the Biblical Mt. Sinai.

Williams point is that the Egyptian cattle, and the depictions of cattle in the various life situations in a non-cattle area, lend strong evidence that this area was visited by the Hebrew pilgrims from ancient Egypt who camped here at the time of the Exodus. Actually, as was mentioned above, there is a large rock near the foot of Maqla depicting cattle, bulls, long-horned goats, sheep, a snake, dog and cat-like creatures, and a man with a bow and arrow. (Fig.16) Also, several of the cattle have horns that are much more similar to the Apis bull that can be found on the alleged Golden Calf Altar site. If this

²⁰⁹ M.C.A. MacDonald, North Arabia in the First Millennium BCE, 1357

were the only place where there were cattle in Arabia and the cows on the “altar site” were clearly Egyptian, being distinctive from all the other bovine rock art around Arabia, then there may be more significance to this location as the Altar of the Golden Calf site. One could say the scene in Fig. 16 on the large rock would describe a scene in the daily lives of the Hebrew pilgrims. However, if this depicts the cattle they brought with them into a non-cattle country, why would they be etched just like the Apis god is carved on the “Altar site” and again wouldn’t these be graven images and wouldn’t these also be destroyed like the carvings on the “Altar site” would have been destroyed? Another theory comes to mind as one observes the photo of this “daily life rock” at Makla in Lennart Moller’s finely illustrated book, The Exodus Case. On page 265 of this work, he compares one carving on this rock with a picture of a tomb painting of Egypt (Fig. 20) The similarity is remarkable, even to the shape of the head of the “worshipper” under the bovine. Also, the horns seem to favor the shape of the more cultic Apis depictions of bulls. Could this particular piece of art *chronicle one of the events* of the stay of the Hebrews in this area? It seems this particular drawing depicting what seems to be the worship of a bull is one of a kind. Could this have been left by Moses perhaps to illustrate their sin, not as a drawing of a god to worship? The Saudi’s make the statement that “cow worship was common in prehistoric Arabia. Scenes of cow-worship and idoliform representations are commonly found in the Tabuk area.”²¹⁰

However, it was also very common in Pharaonic Egypt in the days of the

²¹⁰ Al-Ansary, 78.



Fig. 20. Tomb Painting/Apis Worshipper. Lennart Moller, The Exodus Case. (Copenhagen: Scandinavia Publishing House, 2000) 265.

Exodus, and this particular rock art image leaves a strong Egyptian impression.

Another question one might pose is if this area is suitable for just sheep, goat, and only “adaptable animals,” how could the cattle of Israel survive their wanderings? We know that Israel brought out their livestock at the Exodus (Exodus 12:38). Certainly the environs of Midian could sustain masses of livestock. The fact that these scenes depict such a plethora of animal life indicates this region could sustain them.

Then one might question the dating of the rock art around Jabal al Lawz. Franz notes that Khan, a Saudi Arabian archaeologist dated the “patched bovine” to the Neolithic Period, which is “considerably earlier” than the Late Bronze Age, and the date of the Exodus.²¹¹ Franz concludes, therefore, that the bovines could not have been etched at al-Lawz during Israel’s encampment, and also that during the Neolithic Period there was more rain and this could have sustained the indigenous cattle depicted in the petroglyphs. These conclusions about the rainfall in this area at various time periods are speculative and debatable. Franz sees these etchings as having nothing to do with the importing of cattle from the outside by the Hebrews because these petroglyphs were made when the land could sustain plenty of cattle. Jehro’s flocks had plenty of grazing area, but the needs of sheep and cattle are of course different.

In the official site survey of Jabal al Lawz and al Bad, which included Kahn’s ideas, were the following conclusions: “Petroglyphs of

²¹¹ Franz, Is Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia? 110.

human and animal figures may be attributed to a period 3000 BC to 1500 BC (Chalcolithic and Iron Age). The dating is relative and tentative based on the cultural objects located in the vicinities or near the rock art sites.”²¹² The dating of these “cultural objects,” i.e. pottery, stone objects/tools, etc. is also too speculative to exclude the Late Bronze period. Another confident assertion is made in this survey: “The cattle figures located on Jabal al Lawz with geometric patterns on their bodies, and in one case a person worshipping an ox, are contemporary to the Nabataean period[...].”²¹³ Again, to relegate these petroglyphs to 100 BC-AD100, based on the absence of artifacts from an earlier period at a nearby ancient structure, and the presence of “Nabataean Redware” at the same structure is still speculative. The migration of Nabataeans into the area later, does not automatically date all structures and rock art from that era.

As noted in footnote 149, the dating of rock art is not without controversy. Khan suggests Thamudic script was developed and in use between 1200 BC and 800 BC. However, a patched bovine in the Jabal al Lawz area had a Thamudic inscription, leading Livingstone and Khan to muse that the cattle in the petroglyphs were not likely in the region when Thamudic script was in use. Therefore they suggest that maybe the dating of the script is incorrect or the carved cattle were cult animals [meaning they were not actually indigenous].

²¹² Al Ansary, 48.

²¹³ Ibid. 82.

Another example of some concern over dating procedures is noted in Dr. Alison Betts article called “Graffiti from Qasr’Amra: a note on dating Arabian Rock Carvings.”²¹⁴ Dr. Betts found some carvings apparently depicting oryx or a similar animal carved *over* the Umayyad murals at Qasr’ Amra. The carvings are very similar in style to those found elsewhere on rocks in the desert that have been somewhat arbitrarily identified in various publications as “prehistoric.” Dr. Betts simply warns her colleagues to be careful in their dating procedures and in a subsequent communication says that it is a “highly inexact science.”²¹⁵

Realizing therefore that dating at times can be arbitrary, it is certainly not an absolute that these bovine petroglyphs were already present at Jabal al Lawz in the days of Moses or that indeed they were carved in Moses day. Nevertheless, with the arguments presented above, there are some weaknesses in the theory that the carvings on the boulders at Lawz/Maqla were indeed carved by the Hebrews of the Exodus, and that it is the Altar of the Golden Calf. This however does not weaken the overall thesis.

The altar site could have been on top of or in front of this site, but the proof is not in the presence of these carvings on the rocks. As, was noted, it

²¹⁴ The article itself was not available, but in an e-mail correspondence, Dr. Betts summarized the article. Dr. Betts received her PhD from London University and has had a distinguished professional career in archaeology. She has written several books, made many contributions to books; published conference papers, and written for scientific journals. Her areas of interest and expertise include nomadic peoples, lithic studies, graffiti and rock art, and she has done many studies on site in Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

²¹⁵ In an e-mail from Dr. Betts, she makes the following statement regarding the exactness of rock art dating: “You must be aware that dating rock art is a highly inexact science. Unless you have art sealed by stratified remains which is very rare or you can date it by means of some of the microanalysis techniques which examine pigment for varnish, you are simply guessing. There are some relative sequences based on overcutting but frequently rock art is dated by the proximity of a site which of course means nothing since the proximity of a nuclear reactor is as meaningful as the proximity of a flint scatter. Bovine carvings are quite common and could be LN into Bronze Age.”

would be a favorable site for Aaron to place the idol up above the people and even build his altar aloft as well. It is also an open area where many thousands could draw near. Also, the carvings *could* have been from the Late Bronze Period. However, one does not need a weak argument to support a number of strong ones. Objective evaluation of this site will render plenty of evidence for the thesis. Again, if the etchings were already present at the time of Moses, would God have brought them to an area replete with representations of Egyptian sacred bulls? However, one may ask, were these indeed sacred cult bulls or simply depictions of the cattle Israel brought from Egypt? The petroglyph on the “daily life rock” that looks like a person holding up a calf in worship may indeed be the depiction of the offering of a calf for sacrifice or something other than worship. Thus, these patched bovine in the area, may have simply been depictions of Israel’s cattle, not objects of worship. It is also worthy of note here that on the “daily life rock,” there is a line of cattle with some men in between, which may be depicting the sacrifices of oxen at Moses’ altar. This will be discussed more below as the evidence for what could have been the sacrifice altar is presented.

The rock art represented at Jabal al Lawz may not prove that Jabal al Lawz is Mt. Sinai, but its presence certainly does not contradict the idea. Possibly the bovine artwork of Israel on the rocky outcropping became the staging place for the golden calf rebellion. In Exodus 32:4, the Hebrew text actually says “gods” not “god” when Aaron declared, “This is *your god*, O Israel, who brought you out of Israel.” Aaron may have been referring to their

previous “innocent” bovine artwork, now included with the golden calf up above.²¹⁶ The other bovine petroglyphs in the various areas mentioned above, may therefore be a common depiction of cattle in this time period. These petroglyphs need not be Egyptian Apis or Hathor, as there are such a variety of etchings. Israel may have been depicting their cattle as they were often depicted in Egypt. Therefore, if it was not their original intention to depict cult deities, then Moses may not have felt the need to destroy the etchings. If these *are* the handiwork of Israel at Sinai, Moses left many such drawings intact.

Also, these may have been etchings from a different time period from various Arabian tribes.²¹⁷ With the site full of such depictions of artistic “non-cultic cattle,” the Jews may have been reminded of Apis or Hathor, and here staged their rebellion.

Indeed this “Golden Calf” altar site may have some real significance to the support of this thesis. If it does, it is better to regard it as natural outcropping of rock, where for practical reasons the rebellion of the Golden Calf was staged.

3. The Testimony of Inscriptions

As noted in the footnote above, there are few *Westerners* that have documented the site of Jebel el Lawz/Maqla in photo and video form as completely as Jim and Penny Caldwell. They are astute observers and bring

²¹⁶ Jim and Penny Caldwell brought this observation to my attention.

²¹⁷ Note the results of a large team of specialists in rock art who surveyed al-Bad, Jabal al-Lawz, Hisma, and the Tabuk area in 1984: “Hundreds of cattle figures from various cultural periods are located in different styles and compositions.” *al-Bid* ‘, 80.

no archaeological bias on one hand or archaeological expertise to the conclusions they make. However, they have consulted various experts in a variety of fields to help them understand the different bodies of evidence they have uncovered.

Again, objectivity will be the determined desire in the evaluation of their observations. Some of the evidence mentioned here is purely their testimony with some photographic backup. Their scrutinous observations along with various experts, will be considered in addition to the observations and conclusions of the Department of Antiquities.

In the years between 1991 and 1999, the Caldwells took every opportunity- weekends, vacations, etc., to travel to the al Lawz region to photographically document the area. Regarding inscriptions, they made the following comments: “We have seen many [inscriptions] in and around the Jabal al Lawz area, but also in and around the split rock area [Rephidim], and really, all over the Midian region.”²¹⁸ Upon consultation and study they found what they thought were “Kufic” Arabic (older) and younger Arabic inscriptions. Also, as Livingstone mentioned, Thamudic inscriptions.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Jim and Penny Caldwell, e-mail correspondence, March 31, 2002. The Caldwell’s believe the area west of the twin-peaks of el-Lawz/el Maqla, is the area the Scripture refers to as Rephidim, where Israel battled Amalek and where Moses brought water forth from the “Split-Rock in Horeb” (Exodus 17:4-6; 19:2; Psm. 78:15). It is believed that Israel traveled the Wadi Afal and passed between the mountains into the open plain, and immediately turned east into the foothills of the western side of Jabal al Lawz, where they soon reached Rephidim. When they speak of Midian, it is speaking of the Hejaz area of northwestern Saudi Arabia.

²¹⁹ See footnote 149. Khan feels Thamudic is ancient Arabian Bedouin tribal script that originated in Saudi Arabia and was not imported. This script is found all over Saudi Arabia and as far as Jordan and Syria.

Livingstone questioned the dating of the Thamudic script, and Kahn really could not be sure of this script's origin.²²⁰

Dr. Miles Jones has been doing extensive research on this Thamudic script.²²¹ In a brief summary of his work, The Writing of God, he makes the following statement, “We have a clear historical and linguistic record that traces all existing alphabets to a single source, a single initial alphabet. Despite the diversity of form of the many alphabets such as Hebrew, Sanskrit, Arabic, Greek, Roman, and others, they are all derived from the initial breakthrough which happened in or around the Sinai in the second millennium before Christ.”²²² Dr. Jones believes that this oldest character script without images or “pictures,” may have originated with Moses, or God gave it to Moses. It may have been the script which God wrote on the tablets of stone with His own hand (Exodus 31:18). Moses was writing down the words of the Lord on the mount (Exodus 24:4). Moses may have learned it from Jethro. This language could have been the source for both proto-Hebrew and proto-Arabic, and many other non-pictographic scripts.

Thamudic script has been found near the traditional site for Mount Sinai. In the Egyptian turquoise mines at Serabit el-Khadim, excellent examples of this old script were found. However, until the meaning of the various inscriptions is determined, this simply means there were Semitic

²²⁰ Kahn, Recent Rock Art and Epigraphical Investigations in Saudi Arabia, 113-118. Kahn “suggests” his conclusions along with other indefinite terminology. Alison Betts was quoted as noted this inexactness earlier.

²²¹ Dr. Miles Jones, PhD, is a graduate of the University of Texas (Austin), in Language Education. His undergraduate degrees focus in the areas of Language and Linguistics. He has done much research in the area of Historic Linguistics, and has been engaged in the study of the origin of the alphabet since 1980. He has studied in Yemen, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Paris and other fields.

²²² Miles R. Jones, The Writing of God, unpublished article, Bastrop, Texas, 1.

laborers there, and not necessarily the Hebrews of the Exodus. There are several Thamudic inscriptions around the foot of Jabel al Lawz. Once again, Dr. Jones and others are still seeking to determine the exact interpretation of these, even though the Saudis have offered some of their own.²²³ An interesting theory proposed by Dr. Jones identifies the proto-Hebrew letter “Kaf” on the petroglyph of the sandals found near Jabel al Lawz. This petroglyph is one of several like it. The meaning of the letter and the possible association of the petroglyph with Israel from Bible references such as Deuteronomy 11:24 and Joshua 1:3, make an interesting case for the presence of the Hebrews at Jabel al Lawz (Fig. 21). There is more research to be done to validate this theory, and there are further arguments given in favor of it by Dr. Jones in his dissertation. The description of Dr. Jones’ arguments offered here is very brief and should not be the criteria to accept or dismiss his research.

Most of the other candidates for Mt. Sinai are found in the Sinai Peninsula. What inscriptional evidence is present around these mountains? If the traditional site of Jebel Musa/Katerina were indeed the Biblical Sinai, one would expect to discover some etched evidence that would support the presence of hundreds of thousands of displaced Egyptian Hebrews.

Regarding the inscriptions found at Serabit el Khadim and their weight to support an Exodus visit there, according to Menashe Har-el, the escaping Jews would want to avoid this area, as it likely had an Egyptian military presence to protect the mines. Har-el comments: “In our opinion the

²²³ Al-Ansary, 51.



Fig. 21. Thamudic Script and Shoe Petroglyph, Abdul al Ansary, Al-Bid, History and Archaeology. (Riyadh, S. Arabia: Deputy of Antiquities and Museums, 2002) 36. Shoe photo courtesy of Jim and Penny Caldwell.

discovery of relief's showing battles between the kings of Egypt and the nomads proves definitely that there was a standing army there."²²⁴ There are many Nabatean inscriptions from the Roman period, that were commercial in nature, and then the flood of Armenian, Greek, and Latin inscriptions that herald the influx of Christian tradition in the Byzantine era and later.²²⁵ Actually, there are Old North Arabic inscriptions, Russian, Syriac, Spanish, Coptic, English, and Italian. There are thousands of such inscriptions all over the Sinai Peninsula, including etched crosses by the thousands.²²⁶ All of the rock art, signs, inscriptions and drawings at Jebel Musa, Serabit, Sirbal, and at Wadi's Shellal, Tueiba, or Firan, supply no evidence for a fourteenth-thirteenth century BC visit of over two million Jews. In G. I. Davies work, which includes all known Hebrew inscriptions to 200 BC, he testifies of no Hebrew inscriptions from the southern Sinai.²²⁷ Kerkeslager summed up the testimony of Michael Stone: "Out of 6000 inscriptions from the region, one is Aramaic, and four are Hebrew. Only a few others are of Jewish origin [...]." Stone summed up the inscriptural evidence and other sourced in a private communication of June 30, 1997, by saying: " I know of no real evidence for Jewish interest in the Sinai in the pre-Christian period and precious little later."²²⁸ At this time, the inscriptions around Jabal al Lawz have not *proven* a Jewish interest or presence in the pre-Christian period either. Most of the

²²⁴ Har-el, Sinai Journeys, 224.

²²⁵ Michael E. Stone, and Leslie A. Kobayashi, Rock Inscriptions and Graffiti Project: Catalogue of Inscriptions. SBLRBS 29 (vol. 2 Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 228-244.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ G. I. Davies, Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions: Corpus and Concordance. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) xxvi.

²²⁸ Kerkeslager, 150.

inscriptions however, in the environs of alternate sites, are from the “Christian era” as pilgrims flooded to the perceived region of Mt. Sinai.

Upon examination of the scholarly research of Dr. Miles Jones and other linguistic scholars, there may be a link between the Thamudic inscriptions around Jabal al Lawz; their meaning, their association with the petroglyphs of sandals and the presence of Israel there in the time of the Exodus. Opening up the area for further scrutiny by Western scholars would also prove helpful to bring more complete analysis.

4. The Testimony of Natural Features and Phenomenon

a. The Rock At Horeb

It would be prudent to consult the primary source here and describe the account. In Exodus 17:1-7, Moses and the children of Israel were moving east coming northeast from the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba, and they perhaps traveled down the Wadi Afal passing into the open plain before turning east toward Jabal al Lawz. In a long valley, which runs basically north and south along the lower range leading up to the Lawz range, there are many boulder hills ranging from twenty to several hundred feet tall.²²⁹ In this valley is plenty of room for a camp of up to two million people. The Scripture says they camped at Rephidim.

The location of Rephidim has always been in question. Having given evidence for the location of Sinai at Jabal al Lawz above, and assuming the Hebrews would be traveling from west to east, and noting in

²²⁹ Jim and Penny Caldwell. This is eyewitness testimony of one of this couple’s many trips into this area. E-mail correspondence, April 9, 2002. “Boulder hills” refer to collections of rocks and boulders that form mounds and hills.

Exodus 17:1 and 6 that Rephidim is near Horeb, this plain is a likely candidate for the incident of Meribah. In Exodus 18:5, it says Jethro brought Moses' wife and sons out to the wilderness where Israel was camping. It was established earlier that Jethro's home was located at Madiam, or Madyan which is around 15 miles east of Jabal al Lawz. This would fit the location of Jabal al Lawz, because in Exodus 19: 1-2, it says they left Rephidim and came to the wilderness of Sinai and then camped in front of the mountain. Thus at Rephidim they camped at the mountain of God, and then they traveled from Rephidim to another wilderness area and camped again in front of the mountain. This situation makes sense with the proposed layout of the key sites in the environs of Jabal al Lawz. The two campsites are on opposite sides of the al Lawz/al Makla range.²³⁰ They would have to travel back to the west to Wadi Afal and turn north, and then they probably turned east and followed the Wadi al Suraym until it met the Wadi Abyad. They then followed it south until it curved back west to the plain before the eastern face of Maqla and al Lawz. Therefore, it is in Rephidim that the Scripture describes the incident with the Rock of Horeb (Figs.12 & 13).

The people were complaining again as to their need of water. God then instructs Moses to stand before "*the* rock at Horeb." It seems God and Moses both know of this rock. It was a "rock," not the mountain of Horeb. Also, the use of "at," "in," or "of," to describe the location of the rock

²³⁰ Jabal al Lawz and Jebel el Makla are considered twin peaks of the same range, even though the peaks are several miles apart. Lawz is to the northwest slightly of Makla.

says that the rock is nearby the mountain of God. The rock is visible from the western slopes of Jabal al Lawz²³¹ (Fig. 22). After Moses had tended sheep in this area for forty years, God did not need to give directions to the rock of Horeb.

Exodus 17:6 goes on to say that Moses was to strike the rock and water would come out of the rock. Water had to come out of this rock, or from beneath it with great pressure, as a trickle would have been a further test for hundreds of thousands of thirsty people and livestock. If one restricts the entire description of this account to Exodus, then the idea of a “split rock” would not fit. One critic makes the following statement about the event: “The ‘split rock of Horeb’ shown in the video [The Exodus Revealed] ignores the clear statement of Scripture that it was the very rock that Moses struck that produced water, not a channel at the bottom of the hill on which the rock stood, as our guides would have us believe. Scripture itself says nothing about a ‘split rock’ (Exodus 17:1-7) only that water came out of the rock, as occurs in many natural springs in the desert. No splitting of the rock is necessary for this to occur.”²³² But, in Psalm 78:15, there is a more detailed description of the hydrology of the event: “He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them abundant drink like the ocean depths. He brought forth streams also from the rock, and caused

²³¹ Lennart Moller, *The Exodus Case*, (Copenhagen: Scandinavia Publishing House, 2000) 244. Fig. 442. Photo by Jim and Penny Caldwell. This photo was by far the clearest found, and the rock is indeed visible from the slopes of al Lawz.

²³² Jeffrey J. Harrison, Rev. of *The Search for the Real Mt. Sinai*, dir. Steve Greisen. *Reel Productions* 9 Sept. (2001) <<http://www.totheends.com/sinairev.htm>>.



Fig. 22. Long Distance View of Split Rock. Moller, 244. Photo, courtesy of Jim and Penny Caldwell.

waters to run down like rivers.” Also, “He opened the rock and water flowed out; it ran in the dry places like a river” (Psalm 105:41).

When one reads all the accounts of this incident in Scripture, this rock and location seem to fit the description. Notice a picture of the rock, and the apparent water erosion at the base of the rock where the water gushed forth. (Fig.23).²³³ Another description is given in Isaiah 48:21: “And they did not thirst when He led them through the deserts. He made the water flow out of the rock for them; He split the rock, and the water gushed forth.” The word for split is *baqa* which means, “to rend, break, divide. The rock is approximately 60 feet high, and thus very prominent as it presides over the plain below. Other eyewitnesses estimate it at 45 – 55 feet high. Penny Caldwell has stood inside the split itself.²³⁴ It is interesting to note Josephus’ description of the event:

When Moses had received this command from God, he came to the people, who waited for him and looked for him; for they say already that he was coming apace from his eminence. As soon as he was come, he told them that God would deliver them from their present distress, and had granted them an unexpected favour; and informed them, that a river should run for their sakes out of the rock; but they were amazed at that hearing, supposing they were of necessity to cut the rock in pieces, now they were

²³³ Moller, 246.

²³⁴ Caldwell, e-mail April 9, 2002.

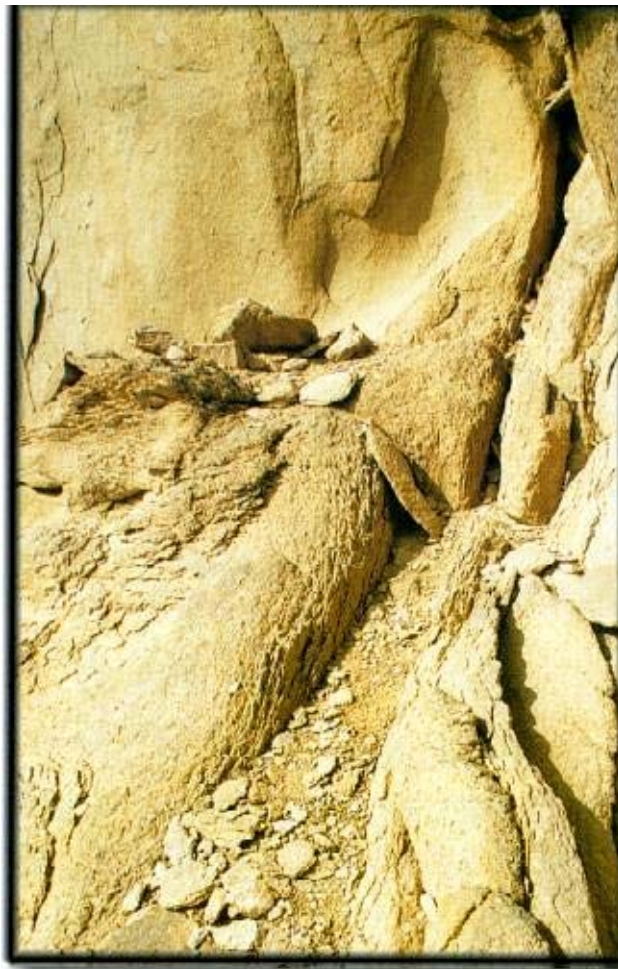
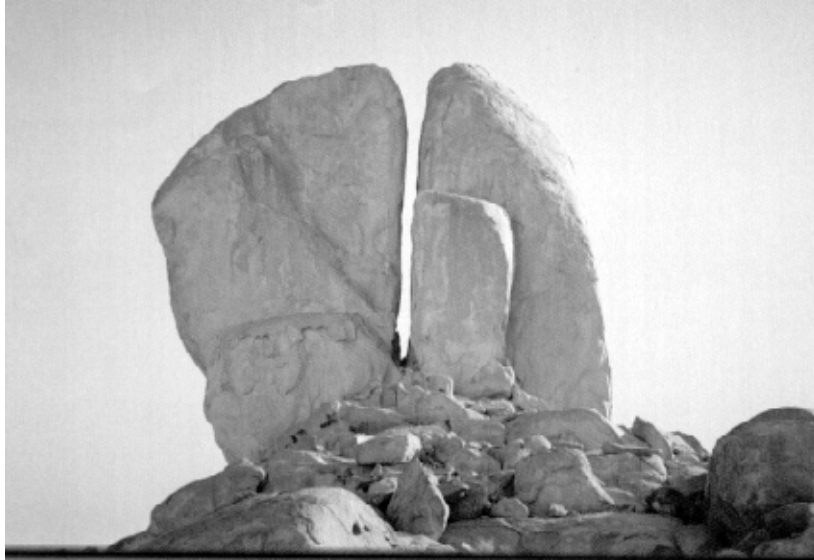


Fig. 23. Close view of Split Rock with erosion at the base of the rock. Courtesy of the Caldwells.

distressed by their thirst, and by their journey—while Moses, only smiting the rock with his rod, opened a passage, and out of it burst water, and that in great abundance, and very clear; but they were astonished at this wonderful effect, and, as it were, quenched their thirsts by the very site of it.”(Antiquities 3/1:7)²³⁵ From Josephus’ sources, we can see that evidently the people were surprised that the water would come out of a rock. According to Moller, digging was a more common way of finding water.²³⁶

Of course, no one is claiming water came out of anything but the rock itself, split open by God through the rod of Moses. Actually, the water obviously came from a deep aquifer below the rock. Also, by the description of the gushing forth in the accounts in Psalms and wording like “waters to run down like rivers,” “gave them abundant drink like the ocean depths,” and “it ran down in the dry places like a river;” one would conclude that there would be a significant wadi there, more than what occasional rain storms would bring in the area.

On this facet of the discussion, it would be helpful to quote from individuals who were eyewitnesses of the rock. The Caldwelles have spent time investigating it, and are aware of the dimensions of the various wadis

²³⁵ It is also interesting that William Whiston the translator of Josephus’ documents says in the footnote on page 67 that “this rock is there at this day, as the travelers agree, and must be the same that was there in the days of Moses. As being too large to be brought thither by our modern carriages.” If this were the same rock spoken of in this thesis, then it would stand to reason that travelers due to its prominence would see it.

²³⁶ Moller, 243.

in the area and in other places in the country and have been in consultation with geologists:

There are deep channels cut out at the base of the rock. Our take on the process by which water was given from the rock is that Moses struck it, just as he was told to do. From deep within the earth under this monolithic rock, sitting atop this boulder hill came a gushing geyser of water [...] the pressure from this earth shaking release of the waters of the deep was forced upward and right through the boulder hill and found its way to the base of the big rock itself.²³⁷

At this point the pressure may have then been released as the Lord through Moses' rod split the rock, allowing the water to gush forth.

Once again if this site is to be the one spoken of in Psalm 78 and 105, the rock would be elevated. Psalm 78:16 reads, "caused waters to *run down* like rivers." The Hebrew word is "*yarad*," meaning to descend, to go downwards, to a lower region, to bring down abundantly. There are many elevated rocks in the area, but they are not as distinctively "split," and they do not seem to have such a clear testimony of the evidence of water leaving it. Another eyewitness source says the rock itself stands about sixty feet high and it is about one hundred feet above the ground level on the boulder hill. Also, the Hebrew word used for the rock of

²³⁷ Jim and Penny Caldwell, e-mail April 9, 2002. It is understood that these ideas are not the conclusions of professional geologists, meteorologists, or hydrologists. They are simply trying to illustrate possible scenarios. A scientist, who is presently studying (8/02) the many photos and videos of the rock collected by the Caldwells, sees clear evidence of very high-pressure hydraulic erosion at the base and all around the lower portion of the rock.

Horeb in Psalm 78:16a, is the word “*cela*,” meaning to be lofty, a craggy rock, a fortress (figuratively). In verse 20, there is another reference to the rock and it is the Hebrew word “*tsoor*,” meaning a cliff or sharp rock.

Once again the eyewitness who observed the rock and the surrounding area noticed smoothed boulders below the rock and deep gouges and channels behind and in front of the rock.²³⁸ Looking at photos of the immediate area beneath the rock it looks like a natural staging place for water to pool and where thousands of people could access it.

Upon examining the “spillway” beneath the rock, there seems to be definite signs of erosion, small “tumbled” chips of rock as if they were assaulted by tons of water. Due to the locations of the signs of erosion, and their probable source, one would not conclude that local flash floods caused what one sees. Gordon Franz makes the comment that “while the area is classified as an arid desert, it does get 100mm(4in) or less rain per year that come in the form of tropical monsoons.”²³⁹

Again, the testimony of some eyewitnesses will be helpful here:

The west side of the mountain range that contains Maqla and Lawz is a very arid desert climate. We did indeed find a book that the Saudis’ published that contains topographical maps showing this western side to get the same rainfall as parts of the Rub al Khali, or Arabia’s most inhospitable desert region. Rainfall amounts in the Rub al

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Gordon Franz, Is Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia, 111.

Khali range from one-half inch per year to one-half inch per ten years... Why am I sure that the water erosion on this particular set of rocks was not caused by flash flooding is that none other of the many boulders hills in this valley have any such channels, gouges, nor erosive patterns. If a flash flood caused this, the rains would have had to pour down on ONLY this rock, while managing to miss the entire rest of the valley. I don't know that anyone who thinks scientifically could possibly come to that as a viable conclusion. Now, in Saudi Arabia in general the rains come only in the winter. Various parts of the kingdom receive more rainfall than others. This western flank of the mountain range is, as stated above, extraordinarily dry. However, when clouds do come from December through February, the prevailing winds drive them from the Gulf of Aqaba on the west. They increase as they encounter the mountains, and generally drop their precipitation on the eastern side. That is why the eastern slopes of Maqla and Lawz are far greener in appearance. Now, mind you, we are still by definition on the east in a desert climate, so we don't mean verdant pastures. Just sparse vegetation that doesn't exist at all on the west side.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Jim and Penny Caldwell, e-mail, April 9, 2002.

There seems to be some variation in the meteorological data on the amount of rainfall in the immediate area. Franz quotes a source from the 1980's. There are those who believe the rain patterns have changed from the Late Bronze Period, and that there was more rain then. However, it is significant that there has been no other "like-effects" of erosion in the surrounding area of the split rock.

A graduate researcher in geography at Southwest Texas State University and amateur archaeologist Dr. Glen Fritz D.D.S. has an excellent knowledge of the geology of Saudi Arabia. He consults regularly with top archaeologists knowledgeable of the region of al Lawz. Dr. Fritz has examined the findings of the latest satellite imagery and diagnostics of the area of Lawz and the Split Rock and made the following conclusions. He explains the event at Horeb as an "artesian system." By examining the excellent photographic evidence of the site, Dr. Fritz indicates that water flow must have persisted for "sufficient time and at a sufficient high energy to erode the granite substrate."²⁴¹ It is helpful to let Dr. Fritz explain his findings in his own words:

Granite is normally resistant to surface water erosion because of its crystalline structure, however, some artesian springs have the potential to also produce chemical weathering due to higher dissolved carbon dioxide concentrations. The higher concentrations are maintained by the pressurized environment found in confined aquifers,

²⁴¹ Glen Fritz, unpublished article, December 10, 2002.

the sources of artesian springs. The carbon dioxide produces a weak (carbonic) acid that causes hydrolysis of the granite. In this process, the potassium feldspar in the granite is hydrolyzed with the end products being kaolinite clay and silica (Marshak 2001).”²⁴²

In response to the idea that this phenomenon was produced by flash floods, Glen Fritz made this observation:

The only other likely alternative to an artesian flow would involve flash flood events. However, even if significant historical flooding had occurred, the erosion would not be isolated to one hill. Flood erosion would create horizontal bands in all of the lower-lying rock in a given area and such a pattern is not evident at this site.²⁴³

One might question some of the conclusions of Dr. Fritz regarding the geology of the region, due to the inaccessibility of the site. Again, quoting from him:

Digital processing techniques involving filters, band ratios and principal component analysis (cf. Gardner, Khan, and Al-Hinai 1996; Davis and Berlin 1989) were applied for exploratory investigation of the geology. These techniques provided mapping of surface information that is not readily observable at ground level. From an aerial view, the granite

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

surfaces of the region display many striations or lineaments that can represent various faults, joints or fractures. A noticeable change in the trend of the lineaments occurs in the vicinity of the outcropping [the Split Rock]. The bending of the striations could be a surface expression of a shear zone (Drury 1987) or subsurface fractured bedrock containing zones of porosity and permeability. Such irregularities could collect and channel underground water (Gold 1980) or act to direct its flow to the surface (Marshak 2001). The digital techniques revealed a series of joints, fractures or faults converging in the vicinity of the split rock formation.”²⁴⁴

Fritz then illustrates the area with a satellite view. It is a composite image of various geologic fault lines, joints or fractures at the proposed Rock of Horeb. This is based on data from Landsat 7. Based on this information he makes these comments:

Although the illustration only covers about 10 square miles, the concentrated pattern of this network was unique in comparison with the general region. The presence of this fault complex is potential evidence of a historic mechanism for the decompression of an underlying artesian aquifer (Gupta 1984). Any aquifer confined within the impermeable granite bedrock in this area would likely have

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

an elevated hydrostatic pressure. Seismic activity, capable of creating a fissure or displacing a fault in communication with such an aquifer, could facilitate the release of trapped water. The volume and duration of the artesian flow would be determined by the aquifer size, the permeability of the formation and the hydraulic head pressure.”²⁴⁵

A possible reference to this seismic activity is found in Psalm 114:7-8.

Dr. Fritz, upon examining the photos of the washed area and the “spillway,” beneath the Rock, said that it is an anomaly to the whole region. To have a very smooth worn surface next to a rough one, is indeed unique, and an odd geologic formation.²⁴⁶

If one examines the passages of Scripture in detail that address the “Rock of Horeb,” the rock described above fits the details well. Obviously this rock itself does not give conclusive evidence that it is *the* rock Moses split in Biblical Rephidim and that it sits in the ancient camp beneath the slopes of Mt. Sinai. However, taken with the historical, scientific, and other evidence presented thus far, it seems to be a reasonable candidate. This would of course favor the Lawz/Sinai thesis.

b. The Mountain Stream

According to Deuteronomy 9:21, there was a brook or a stream flowing down from the mountain. “And I took your sinful the calf which you have made, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it very

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Glen Fritz, phone interview, December 9, 2002. This information is not a quote.

small until it was fine dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that came down from the mountain.” The Hebrew word for “brook” is “*nachal*” and can mean a stream, a winter torrent, or river. The incident is also referred to in Exodus 32:20.

It is therefore likely that such a stream, flowing down from Mt. Sinai, steadily for at least the nine plus month’s they were there, would leave a significant wadi.²⁴⁷ Today the wadi remains dry except during the rare flash flood. However, in the Late Bronze Age, this stream, one might think, would need to be fairly robust to meet the thirst needs of nearly two million people plus animals.

It would be again helpful here to have the site described by an actual observer:

At Jebel Maqla²⁴⁸ there is one very distinct looking wadi that comes down to the left of the peaks as you are facing west looking at it [Fig. 24]. This is the main wadi that services the much larger and wider streambed at the base of the mountain. While there are others, they are generally broken and scattered before reaching the bottom. Sometimes they actually turn back into this main channel.

²⁴⁷ According to Jim and Penny Caldwell, the streambed is 10-12 feet deep and 20-30 feet wide consistently from its point of origin partway up the mountain to where it ends far out in the valley. Penny Caldwell, Field Report – At The Base Of Jebel Maqla, January 2002.

²⁴⁸ There are twin peaks about several miles apart, Jabal al Lawz, the highest in the region, and Jebel Maqla, which has a blackened peak, mentioned above by Philby. This may be the reason there are two names given to the site. For the purposes of this thesis, Jabal al Lawz would be designated as Horeb and Maqla would be Sinai. The “Split Rock” of Horeb is on the slopes of al Lawz, so this would fit the Biblical account. Jabal al Lawz means Mountain of Almonds or Almond Mountain, and al Maqla means the “quarry.”



Fig. 24. View from "Mt. Sinai" of mountain stream bed, "Moses Altar" (Black circle), and "Golden Calf Altar" site (White Circle). This natural amphitheater on the east side of Lawz is what is called the "Holy Precinct" or "Covenant Site." (Courtesy of Jim and Penny Caldwell)

As you get to the base of the mountain, this streambed becomes really obvious. It is wide and very dug out by water. In places the stones in the bottom of it are numerous and washed very smooth. In other places, the stones are sparse and the sand and crushed granite that is so common in the area is in the basin... The streambed winds its way behind the altar of sacrifice²⁴⁹ and then continues all the way across the grounds at the base of Maqla and into the vast valley below. In fact, it continues right past the area where the bovine petroglyphs are to be found. This would also match the Biblical account, as Moses took the calf, burned it with fire, ground it to powder, and strew it into the waters.²⁵⁰ The evidence of a streambed here is one of the remains of natural phenomena one must find, if in fact this is the real Mt. Sinai. The reality of wadis being abundant throughout every mountain in the area is also a fact. This is by far not the only mountain in the area with cut channels coming down from above and showing evidence of drainage. They all have them. But this one at Maqla is quite a bit larger than any other we've located in the region, and in fact has a different appearance than most.

²⁴⁹ The Caldwell's identify a structure at the foot of the mountain as Moses' altar of sacrifice. This will be discussed later in the paper.

²⁵⁰ The Caldwell's are referring to the "Altar of the Golden Calf" site that was discussed earlier. It was determined that this site could be the staging point for the golden calf rebellion, and so the stream nearby would again fit the description given in the Bible.

The presence of so many stones in the bottom of his one is unusual, and the very different ground with actually banks on either side is also unusual. Most wadis are chaotic at best, and show plainly the destructive force of rainwater cascading down sharp, rocky peaks. This big streambed looks like any in the U. S. you would drain of water. For this reason it fits the Biblical description well, without having to adjust the data to try to make it seem plausible.”²⁵¹

Critics might argue that flashfloods now and then over thousands of years could have produced this streambed as they did on all the mountains in the area. Why would this streambed imply this mountain is Mt. Sinai? As noted above, it stands to reason, that Mt. Sinai should have had a stream with a significant amount of volume for many months, as it provided for the needs of millions. Indeed, there may have been other streams around, but none are mentioned in Scripture. The description given by eyewitnesses indicates that this wadi was unusual. . It appeared to carry a great volume of water, and come from above the probable campsite of Israel off the mountain. By itself, the presence of the unusual streambed or riverbed is not conclusive, however, taken along with the other natural features and evidences around the site, its meaning is more significant.

²⁵¹ Jim and Penny Caldwell, e-mail April 19th 2002.

Two other sources feel that, due to the topography near the base of the mountain the water *pooled* in a small pond or lake, facilitating the watering of animals and people.²⁵² They feel the water did not flow away, but was dammed up in a lake to accommodate access to the water (Fig. 24). Moller made the following statement: “The depth of the pond can only be roughly estimated. The difference in level between the ‘banks’ and the ‘bed’ of the pond is about seven meters, which meant a considerable amount of water.”²⁵³ Both Wyatt and Moller postulate that some cylinder structures adjacent to or along the edge of the proposed “pond” could have been wells or water filtering systems built by the Hebrews.²⁵⁴ These ideas will be discussed in the section on “structures.”

As noted above, the Caldwell’s feel there is not convincing evidence for the lake theory and that the river meandered down into the valley and would certainly have been available to just as many people as they congregated along its edges, rather than to have amassed into a single area of stagnant water.

Again, the Scripture states that a stream flowed from the mountain of God down into the camp. Its likely, that with the volume needed to provide for such a large group over such a relatively long period of time, the evidence of the stream would remain today. According to the Caldwells, this is no ordinary mountain wadi for the region. With the

²⁵² Jonathan Gray, ed. Sinai’s Exciting Secrets. comp. (Davenport. FL.: AnchorStone International, 1999) 61-64; Lennart Moller, 262 –63.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Gray, 62-64, Moller, 262-63.

rainfall noted above for the region, it is very unlikely that a wadi of this type is a product of flashfloods. This wadi is distinct from the usual “chaotic” wadis, and therefore, should be considered as evidence in favor of a unique “stream-bed” flowing back some time in antiquity. This of course would fit the Biblical profile for the event and location under consideration.

c. The Black Top of Maqla

As Musil and Philby were traveling south on their respective explorations in Saudi Arabia many decades ago, they would enter the Afal Valley on their way to Midian. As they moved closer to al Bad, they saw to the east, “the granite slopes of Lawz and Maqla, *with basalt dykes and seams and caps,*” and in another place he uses the following words, “*the basalt pyramid of Maqla.*”²⁵⁵ Musil described them as “*the half white and half black mountains of al Makla and ar-Raha.*”²⁵⁶ Their description of the type of rock is accurate.²⁵⁷

According to eyewitnesses, when one stands upon the top of Jabal al Lawz and looks in all directions, there is a common brown/gray cast of granite as far as the eye can see in the mountains.²⁵⁸ This blanket of granite, however, is interrupted abruptly with the dark rock on the peak of

²⁵⁵ Philby, 210, 215.

²⁵⁶ Musil, 107.

²⁵⁷ Ensuing evidence below will verify the blackened portion to be amphibolite rock.

²⁵⁸ Jim and Penny Caldwell, phone interview 4-29-02.

Maqla. Its lone distinctiveness makes one wonder why it is so isolated (Fig.25).²⁵⁹

At this point two greatly divergent views will be introduced to explain this phenomenon. One view is that it is completely explained by nature. The dynamic forces of the earth produced it. The other view is that this was produced by a combination of a natural presence of rock, and supernaturally by a heat source above the peak, i.e., the Presence of Jehovah on the mountain. Proponents of the latter view, who feel there is overwhelming evidence that this is the Biblical Mt. Sinai, feel that it would be likely that the events of Exodus 19:16-21, would leave some lasting mark on the mountain. They feel that it is a reasonable conclusion to make if this mountain has a valid claim to be Mt. Sinai. Either way, this mountain is very distinctive.

Criticism of the “scorched” view is as follows. One individual made this statement:

The black color on top of the mountain is simply a different kind of rock than that found at its base. Beautiful multicolored mountains can be seen all over this area, ranging in color from red to pink to blue to black. The black crust on the rock is a product of weathering and has nothing to do with fire scorching the mountain. This type of rock, which is not granite, was favored for making

²⁵⁹ Most photos of the “blackened peak,” as in the Figure 25, are of a small part of the whole blackened area. This photo is actually the lower footprint of Maqla, the lower east end of the mountain. It continues on for about a kilometer to its higher peak to the northwest.

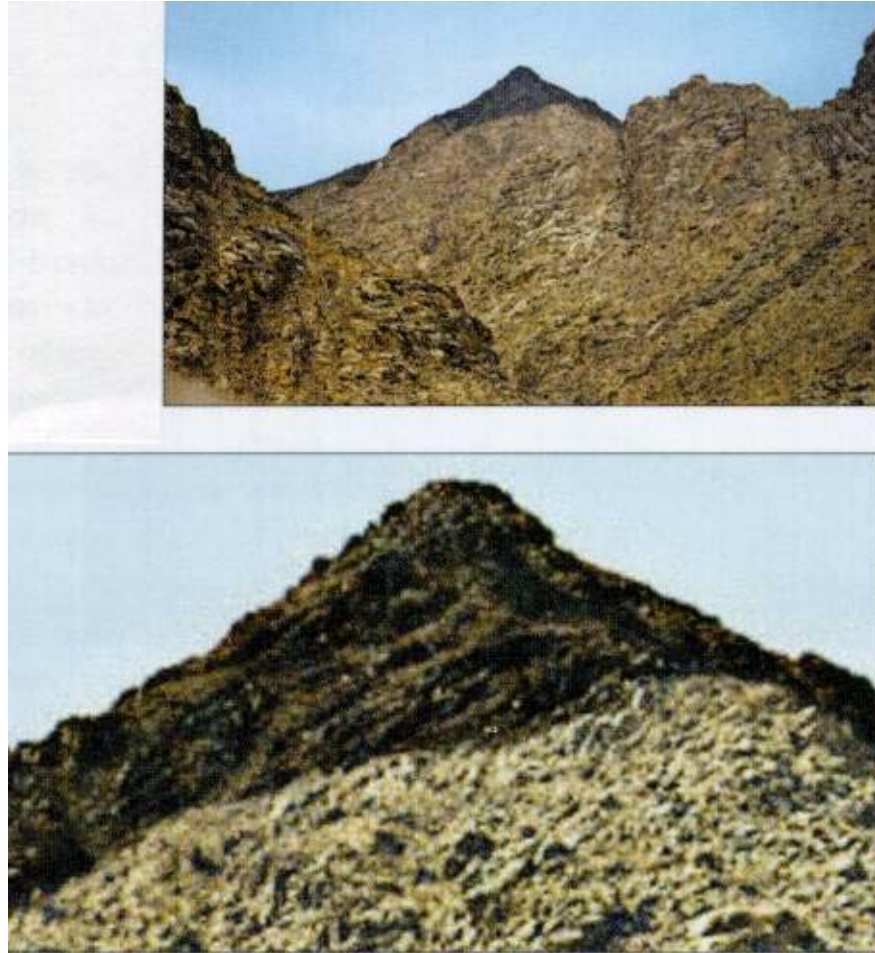


Fig. 25. Blacken Peak of Makla (Sinai). Courtesy of the Caldwells.

petroglyphs ...because when a pattern was scratched through the weathered surface, the natural color of the rock beneath showed through (usually a reddish color). This made a nice contrast with the black, weathered surface. Besides, the fire that fell on Mt. Sinai is not described as having any such effect (Exodus 19:16-18).²⁶⁰

In opposition to the views expressed in Larry Williams book, The Mountain of Moses: The Discovery of Mount Sinai, Brad Sparks says:

The book is inconsistent in doubting at one place whether any evidence of such burning [the burning bush] would be left after three millennia (pp.77-78), and then claiming there is a present-day blackening of the top of Jebel al-Lawz that is unexplained (p.99) and that ‘analysis of rocks from the base show they ‘may have been burned’ (p. 98) Geologist Dr. John Morris told me the Jebel al Lawz rock he examined is normal metamorphic rock typical for the volcanic area it came from, there is nothing strange about it nor any sign of plants melted into the rock.²⁶¹

The views expressed in this section regarding the geology of the region are based on consultation with three university professors.²⁶² It

²⁶⁰ Harrison, 3.

²⁶¹ Sparks, 8. It will be noted later that the smoke resulting from Gods presence on the mountain, would indicate a chemical/thermal event that would likely permanently scar a surface.

²⁶² In April of 2002, personal interviews were conducted with the following men: (regarding the analysis of a rock sample performed by geologist Nehru E. Cherukupalli Ph.D, who is Department Chairman at Brooklyn College, and is Research Associate at the American Museum of Natural History) Dr. Ed Bostick, professor in Earth Sciences at Kennesaw State University, Dr. Marion Wampler, professor of Isotopic

would be important to also quote an eyewitness of the peak who has consulted a geologist as well:

The tops of the two peaks are approximately two miles apart. The rocks on the peak of Maqla [black peak] are comprised of two different types. The one Jim called greenstone [a geologist friend labeled it such] is an extremely hard and dense smooth stone, a very dark bluish-gray-black in appearance. It is equally distributed among the entire upper region of Maqla. The other rock is darkened to the point of appearing black. It is absolutely granite, of the exact same variety of the entire rest of the mountains in the area. It appears reddish-pinkish-brown on all the surrounding mountains. The difference in this peaks dispersion of this rock is that it has been darkened. By what, I don't know. It is much softer in texture than the greenstone. While you absolutely cannot break the greenstone, you can relatively easily strike the granite against another stone and break it open...once broken open,

Geochemistry, at Georgia Institute of Technology and Dr. Tim Latour, professor of Geology at Georgia State University who majored in Metamorphic Petrology and Geologic Chemistry. The rock sample that was analyzed by Cherukupalli, was received from Bob Cornuke, who brought the specimen back from al Maqla, in Saudi Arabia. The analysis of the rock is printed below in its entirety: "Rock description: a very fine grained greenish looking rock. Could not identify much in it. After studying the polished thin section of the rock it is given the name amphibolite: The rock is fine grained and is crystalline. Amphibole (actinolitic type), bluish green in color along with some chlorite and possible albitic plagioclase feldspar make up the rock. There are a few accessory minerals like opaque iron oxides. The rock is metamorphosed in the low to middle amphibolite facies and may have undergone metamorphism at an approximate temperature of 500 degrees or lower at low pressure, no more than 2 to 3 kilobars. My guess is that the rock started out as an igneous rock, probably of basaltic or andesitic composition and was later metamorphosed. It is not possible to determine the age of the rock without knowing the geology of the region from which it was collected."

having a darkened rind around it while maintaining the pinkish granite on the inside.²⁶³

Thus, besides the amphibolite rock from Maqla, that has been analyzed in detail, there is an apparent even intermingling of rocks that seem to be granite, that are darkened on the outside and on the inside the rock appears the same as the granite on all the surrounding mountains. Is there a natural explanation for these two types of black rock on the mountain? Is the presence of rocks with a black rind a sign of an external heat source coming down on the mountain? Did God come down and turn the granite top black? Did the presence of God metamorphose the basalt and char the granite? Is this phenomenon unusual enough to make one conclude that what produced this effect was not a natural geologic phenomenon? Can geologists explain this feature in natural terms?

The following is a summary based on the input of the three professors interviewed that were mentioned above. For the most part, they are comfortable explaining the phenomenon as a natural occurrence. Each however reserved judgment on some points due to the need to be on the site and look both at the granite rock samples themselves, and the geology of the surrounding area.

There could be several explanations for the black top of greenstone and blackened granite. One idea may be that the basalt intruded up toward the surface rock and then metamorphosed the rock around the intrusion into the greenstone under the surface and then erosion over many years

²⁶³ Caldwell's, internet correspondence, April 2002.

exposed the greenstone. Another idea may be that the granite was intruded or flowed into the greenstone and some greenstone was left on top. This could be a basalt dyke covered with greenstone. The long weathering process could attest to the intermingled blackened boulders/rocks on the site. When asked if it was typical of intrusions, flows or dykes to produce such an abrupt line of division between two kinds of rock as this mountain does, the professors responded in the affirmative. When one postulates that perhaps the Lord came down on the mountain, and by the intense heat metamorphosed the granite into greenstone, there are some problems with that idea. One concern is that the granite of Maqla is not the parent rock of the black portion or amphibolite. Turning granite into greenstone regardless of heat would have required a large amount of iron to be present in the greenstone. This was not the case with the sample. According to the geologists, the greenstone was metamorphosed at a low temperature with very little iron content. Lighter colored rock is not the parent of the darker rock because the light rock does not have the chemical ingredients to develop into the dark rock. They also make the point that metamorphous granite is not dark, as it is full of quartz.

The granite rocks that were brittle, could be broken open, and had up to a half-inch black rind before revealing the granite color on the inside. This caused some reflection on the professor's part. Typically granite does not metamorphous into a black shiny exterior like cultured

glass, yet on the inside when broken it had the appearance of pinkish granite.²⁶⁴ Bob Cornuke, who visited the site, said the following:

I picked up a piece of charred rock the size of a watermelon, lifted it up over my head, and slammed it on the sharp edge of a boulder. It cracked clean, and we leaned in close to look: an exterior of melted stone, slick like cultured glass, encasing a reddish-tan core. The interior rock was ordinary brown granite.²⁶⁵

Could this be an indication of an external heat source from above on the mountain?

It was not likely that heat had caused this effect, if the rock was indeed granite, as granite would not be shiny black on the surface after its metamorphosis, unless it had been changed to obsidian. According to another eyewitness, the granite-core rocks have a glassy *appearance*, but their texture upon touch was not glassy like obsidian.²⁶⁶ Most observers felt that the black on the granite rocks was some form of weathering. The weathering Jeffery Harrison referred to above, that could be scratched through to make inscriptions is indeed present in the area. However these rocks had up to a half-inch rind before yielding the reddish interior.

²⁶⁴ Evidently, if granite is heated up at a high temperature and then cooled quickly, a shiny black rock called obsidian can be formed. According to Dr. Lennart Moller, obsidian can be found on the mountain. A picture of a sample of what he believes is obsidian is pictured in his book *The Exodus Case*, on page 272.

²⁶⁵ Cornuke, 75.

²⁶⁶ Penny Caldwell, phone interview, May 2, 2002. Mrs. Caldwell admitted that the appearance of the rock looked like slick glass, but it does not feel like glass upon manual examination.

One professor says that chemical weathering can at times produce a deep rind. Also, especially with granite full of quartz, the chemical weathering can weaken the rock to make it more breakable.

However, an eyewitness makes this point: “ My first reaction to this granite turned dark was that the horrid [natural] heat over the years had done its work. But, that is a glaringly incorrect assumption, for all the surrounding mountains are made up of the very same rock [without greenstone interspersed]. If the desert heat had slowly darkened these rocks over time, why weren’t other mountains changed in the same manner?”²⁶⁷ If indeed it is chemical weathering, it remains curious why it is only on this one location, and to this extent. Once again, without seeing the site and the rock samples, geologists are judging almost blindly. If all the descriptions are accurate, then there seems to be some unusual phenomenon here. If this is not obsidianized granite, then it must be weathering. If weathering, why is it so isolated? Was Cornuke mistaking another form of rock for granite? One professor said that there are some very unusual rock formations and minerals that can be indigenous to only one place in the world, so this could be some rare effect of natural processes and minerals.

Is there any other explanation for this black top that would include an intense heat source from outside the mountain from above? It would be helpful to look again at the passage in Exodus 19:18: “ Now Mount Sinai

²⁶⁷ Caldwell's, e-mail, April 6, 2002. On a satellite map of the area, viewed at the Caldwell home in August of 2002, there appeared to be a relatively small “spot” of black similar to Maqla, in a separate area near the mountain. One's inability of seeing it on the ground hinders an adequate evaluation.

was *all in smoke* because the Lord descended on it *in fire*; and its *smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace* and the whole mountain quaked violently.” In Exodus 20:18, it says the mountain *was smoking*. Again in Deuteronomy 4:11, it says, “And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the *mountain burned with fire*, to the very heart of the heavens [...]” Obviously, when God came down on the mountain at this point in fire-producing smoke,²⁶⁸ He produced a furnace of fire that could doubtless vaporize rock. Actually in I Kings 18:38, when God’s fire came down on Mt. Carmel at the request of Elijah, it not only consumed the burnt sacrifice, the wood, water and dust, but the stones of the altar as well!

In discussions with one professor in particular, the question was posed regarding the effects of extremely high heat on granite. He said in the first stages it would take on a thick molten putty-like state, and if it was hot enough the rock could be totally consumed like meteors upon entry into the earth’s atmosphere. God’s fire could be as hot or more hot (I Kings 18:38) than the heat that would bear on a meteor in re-entry.

Once again, for this theory to hold weight, one’s worldview must include the *supernatural*.

²⁶⁸ If one follows the account carefully from Exodus 19:1-25, 24:1-18, and Deut. 4:10-13, 5:4-6, it seems the Lord descended on Sinai *in fire* only once and that relatively briefly. God impressed them with his great power before He would speak His Ten Commandments. It seems on the appointed third day, Exodus 19:16, God came down like a furnace and burned up some rock. Then the Lord came down *without* fire (v. 20) and invited Moses up to speak with him. At this point the fireworks were over. Throughout these passages Moses ascended and descended a number of times. In chapter 24:15-17, Moses ascended again into the cloud of the glory of the Lord. During this visit Moses spent forty days and forty nights. The glory of the Lord at this point was *like a* consuming fire to the eyes of the sons of Israel, but was not a literal burning furnace as before on that one incident. Thus, God’s presence *in literal fire* was relatively brief.

If indeed, the mountain known now as al Maqla, was granite-covered as all of its neighboring peaks, then this brief “touch down” of Jehovah on this peak, in super-heat, could have cooked and vaporized the granite on the peak, exposing the dyke of basalt [which is not only the most common igneous rock on the planet, but is quite prevalent in the Hegaz]. How then did the exposed greenstone get metamorphosed at as low a temperature as 500 degrees [as the sample analysis states], if the rock above it was burned off with such high heat? As the Lord’s fire was on the mountain, the granite beneath the furnace may have acted as a buffer to the high heat above and thus metamorphosed the basalt at a much lower rate. A phenomenon known as thermal gradient may have left some rocks relatively low heated while nearby was a much greater heat. The depth of the granite above the basalt intrusion before the Lord’s descent upon the mountain is, of course, not known. The intensity of the heat and the time of exposure would have to be calculated in the equation. This theory might be seen as a “divine heat intrusion” from above causing perhaps the metamorphosis of the basalt through the remaining granite. Perhaps the remaining granite *was left light colored* and then chemically weathered on *this* peak due to it weakened state from the heat. This could explain the even interspersions of greenstone and granite pieces and the granite’s readiness to break.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ If Cornuke’s description of the outside texture of the granite pieces describes the actual feel of the rock as well and therefore could be obsidian formed on the outside of the granite, then another theory could be brought forward. The Lord’s fire could have moved off the mountain in a moment, leaving the last of the unconsumed granite rocks to cool quickly, thus forming the obsidian rind.

The fact remains that there are some questions about explaining the black top of Maqla in completely natural terms. The fact of such isolated weathering on just one peak on the granite rocks, fosters questions that may only be answered by an on-sight analysis. However, it may be concluded that one might explain this feature as a natural phenomenon. Yet, if one can demonstrate that the Biblical scenario is *possible* from what can be viewed at the site, without disregarding geologic science, then a door stands open to regard the natural/supernatural theories for this phenomenon. However, scientists do not have all the facts that would help answer the all the questions of geology.

Would there be any visible evidence left from the event described in Exodus 19:18 after over 3000 years? If indeed God's fire came down and burned rock away down to a basalt dyke in very granite environs, certainly there would be some evidence of it. Many inscriptions of *man* have lasted at least that long on stone. Does Exodus 19:18, tell the reader specifically that the peak of the mountain was scorched black? The answer is no. Does the Scripture's silence on the issue demand that one conclude there was no permanent mark? This answer is no as well. In the description of the event, smoke ascended off the mountain. This indicates there was a chemical reaction taking place; rock was being burned. Certainly, there would be some visible evidence of such a process. Some objectivity toward this phenomenon would assist in examining the various possibilities. It does seem wise to at least consider the theory that the

blackened portion of Jebel Maqla could be explained by other than natural processes; especially since the site already fits the Biblical account so well, and has such significant support from prominent historians, explorers and scholars as to its association with the true Mt. Sinai.

d. The Cave

I Kings 19:8-15 says that Elijah fled from Jezebel, went to Beersheba in Judah, left his servant there, continued into the wilderness a day's journey and rested. Then the passage says he went forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. Now Elijah must have taken a lot of time to travel to the site as the traditional site is about 200 miles south of Beersheba, and Jabal al Lawz is less than that. If the desert dweller walked 20 miles a day he could have gone to Sinai and back in that amount of time. He was doubtless reflective, examining himself and his situation. He may have thought much about the wanderings of his own brethren many years before in their 40-year wilderness of testing, and Moses' close encounter with God on the mount for 40 days and nights, and how God met all his needs there on the mountain. It is in this frame of heart he came to the mountain of God. The account starts in verse 9: "Then he came there to *a (the) cave*, and *lodged* there; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, What are you doing here Elijah [...]? So He said. "*Go forth* and stand on the mountain before the LORD. And behold, the LORD was passing by"[...] (verse 11) "And it came about when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle,

and *went out and stood in the entrance of the cave*. And behold, a voice came to him and said, “What are you doing here Elijah (verse 13)?”

At this point consider the comments of Jeffery Harrison who does not believe Jabal al Lawz is Mt. Sinai: “Neither is their discovery of a cave on the mountain remarkable. Many caves exist in these desert mountains. While it’s true that there is no cave on top of the traditional Mt. Sinai today, there is no reason why one of the many nooks and crannies on that mountain could not serve as a shelter for Elijah (I Kings 19:9; “*maarah*” in Hebrew can be translated cave, den, or hole). But in any case, this argument does nothing to support a Mt. Sinai in Saudi Arabia.”²⁷⁰

Indeed, there are without doubt caves around all the many alleged sites of for Sinai. There are other caves in the vicinity of Jabal al Lawz.²⁷¹ However, at this point this is the only site with a cave confirmed, up toward the summit. If there is another proposed site found with a cave up toward the summit, the whole context of that site has to be considered with the entire context of the Saudi Arabian site. A cave up on a mountain as evidence, by itself isn’t very convincing, but when taken in context with many other forms of evidence, the weight of the argument grows. However, the Scriptures call for a cave on the mountain. Jabal al Lawz has a cave on the summit. This by itself cannot prove it is Mt. Sinai, but if it is going to be Mt. Sinai, it needs a cave. The word for *cave* *does* mean a *den*,

²⁷⁰ Harrison, 3.

²⁷¹ Caldwell, phone interview, May 6, 2002.

a *hole*, a not a nook or cranny. The word translated “lodged” in the passage implies a permanent intention to stay, “a den to sleep in.” Would Elijah lodge or sleep in a nook or cranny? According to Jim Caldwell, who examined the cave, the approximate size of the cave is fifteen feet high and twenty feet long at the entrance, twenty feet deep, and the ceiling height is fifteen feet near the entrance and diminishes to around eight feet toward the rear of the cave.²⁷² It would seem to be an ideal spot for the prophet to stay awhile.

It is also interesting to note that in the Hebrew the *definite* article is used to refer to this cave instead of “a” cave. C.F. Keil makes the following comment about the use of the definite article: “When Elijah arrived at Horeb, he went into *the* cave [...]”²⁷³ Keil links the cave up to the cleft in the rock of Exodus 33:22, where Moses was shielded from God’s glory. However, clearly the word for cleft in Exodus 33 is distinct from the word for cave in I Kings 19. The word translated “cleft” means a *fissure, cleft*. Why then the definite article? Perhaps it is referring to the *lone* nature of the cave on the mountain. It is indeed the only cave up on the peak (Fig.26).

Does the Scripture specify where the cave was? Does it say the cave was up on the mountain? Again if one compares the instructions God gives Elijah in I Kings 19:11, and 13, it places Elijah up on the mountain itself. In verse eleven God says to Elijah to “*yatsa*” or “go out,” and stand

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ C.F.Keil, Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 3, I Kings (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976) 256.



Fig. 26. "Cave of Elijah" and Almond Tree. Courtesy of Jim and Penny Caldwell.

on the mountain.” Next the verse says that Elijah was lodging in the cave. So God tells Elijah to step out of the cave onto the mountainside. Evidently however, Elijah did not actually step out until after the violent shaking of the LORD passed by and the gentle voice was heard. In verse 13 it says he wrapped his face in his mantle, and “*yatsa*,” “went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.” Thus God was not telling Elijah to go out of a cave, [being in a different place besides up on the mountain], and go to the mountainside. Rather, upon comparing these two verses God was saying to go out of the cave proper and stand at the opening on the side of the mountain and observe God passing by. Because when Elijah does “come out” he is *on* the mountain. Yes, the cave could have been anywhere *on* the mountain, high or low, but it had to be *on* the mountain, the cave at Jabal al Lawz is on the mountain.²⁷⁴

Again, the presence of such a cave on the mountain does not in itself prove this is Mt. Sinai, but Mt. Sinai had a cave on it, and Jabal al Lawz has a *true* cave *on* the mountain.

e. Camp Sites

Mt. Sinai needed to have some open spaces in the near vicinity of the mountain in order to provide camp space for an estimated population of up to two million people plus their animals.²⁷⁵ Those who have been

²⁷⁴ In viewing a video of Jim Caldwell’s examination of the cave, he points out a rock just outside the cave that is half blackened. The half closer to the cave is the unblackened portion. This again could be chemical weathering, and yet it stops halfway across the stone. Could this be the fire’s effect Elijah experienced on his visit (I Kings 19:12)? Or is there less exposure by the sun where the rock is not blackened. Once again, only examination by a geologist will give more insight.

²⁷⁵ Exodus 12:37-38 says that there were about 600,000 men aside from the children. Some feel if one calculates women and children there would at least be 1, 200,000 people. Others see many more. Numbers

eyewitnesses of the traditional location found that the immediate environs of Jebel Musa, could not have accommodated nearly two million people “in front of the mountain”(Exodus 19:2).²⁷⁶ Several passages describe where Israel camped in the vicinity of the mountain. In Exodus 17: 1, it says that the sons of Israel camped at Rephidim. Then 18:5 says that Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, joined Moses at the camp of Israel in the wilderness, at the mount of God. This was while they were still encamped at Rephidim. As mentioned above, Rephidim and the “Split rock” are thought to be on the western side of the Lawz range. This “wilderness” camp near the mountain needed to be large enough for the Israelite camp. Then, in 19:2, it says they left Rephidim and came to the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in “front of the mountain.” At Jabal al Lawz, this would be the eastern side of the mountain. Once again this needs to be an expansive area that accommodates campers. It is understood once again that these accommodating conditions do not prove this is Sinai, as there are other mountains under question that have more accommodating campsites than the traditional site as well. However, as noted above in the

2:32,26:51 may imply the 600,000 men were only the men 20 years old and over who were able to fight. Also, Exodus 12:38 it says in addition to the Israelites, a mixed “multitude” went up with them. Lennart Moller estimates the population at 1,996,000 in his elaborate calculations in his book The Exodus Case, referred to above (See pages 153-161).

²⁷⁶ Bob Cornuke made the following observations: “I have an aerial photograph from the top of the mountain [traditional site] showing there are mountain peaks all around and very little area where anything could grow or sustain life... Looking from the top at a 360-degree view, there were just mountains all around. There were no camps, tents, or Bedouins”(Larry Williams, 66). Cornuke also said: “A commanding view of the lowlands showed us Jebel Musa’s perch high in a rugged mountain range, an impossibly steep pitch for an expansive campsite. Two branches of wadis meandered between nearby mountain ranges, but these narrow ravines could have harbored but a fraction of the enormous assembly. The ‘traditional campsite’ noted by scholars cannot even be seen from the top of the peak – this in spite of Exodus 19:2, which confirms the Hebrew campsite lay immediately adjacent to the mountain. The Israelites ‘camped *in front of* the mountain.’ But from our vantage Jebel Musa had no front to speak of”(Cornuke, 202.). The Caldwells also made similar observations on their trip to Jebel Musa.

Biblical narrative, there needed to be large open plains all around the mountain.

Eyewitnesses who have visited the site on numbers of occasions made the following observations: “Looking east from the top of Lawz/Maqla there is the open plain right at the foot of the mountain [called the “holy precinct] and then beyond that plain it opens into a vast plain approximately two miles wide and five miles long(Fig. 24). There is a similar sized plain on the western side of the range where the sons of Israel could have camped at Rephidim. There is also a north/south corridor which is more narrow than the east/west sites.²⁷⁷ If the present condition of the land in this area represents the time of Moses, it could also provide ample vegetation for animals. It is apparent from the Scripture, that the environs around Sinai could at least accommodate Jethro’s sheep in Moses’ day.

Moller describes the area as “40 square kilometers” with even larger valleys in all directions where the Israelites could put up tents and keep livestock.²⁷⁸

f. The Plateau

Once again when one studies the account of the events on and around Mt. Sinai in Exodus 24, one would expect to find certain natural features to support the account. In verse nine of chapter 24, it says that “Moses went up, also Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of

²⁷⁷ Penny Caldwell, phone interview, May 6, 2002. Information is a summary of her comments not a word for word quote.

²⁷⁸ Moller, 254.

Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. *And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity.*” Evidently, somewhere on the route up the mountain was a place where at least 74 people could stand, sit, and eat. Indeed, other Sinai sites may have such a feature, but without it being as accommodating for the elders, as the site on Jabal al Lawz. It did not have to be flat, it did not have to be as large as this place, rather the group could have been lined up or three wide on a widened point on a trail up the mountain. The Scripture does not indicate how far up the mountain the place was. Also, for such a spectacular viewing of God Almighty by a private audience, one might think it would be a more concealed location up toward the summit.

Eyewitnesses describe the site as around two thousand feet up Jebel Maqla. They describe it as crater-like, though not volcanic. It is a “private” spot where one could not see what would have been the campsite of Israel, nor could events there be viewed from the floor of the plain.²⁷⁹

Another source makes the following description:

Assuming that this total of 74 people each needed 5 square meters, then this plateau needed to be at least approximately 400 square meters [...] This plateau covers an area of several thousand square meters, which means that there was plenty of space for the 74 individuals allowed on the mountain [...] Horeb should have a relatively large plateau a little way up the mountain, but

²⁷⁹ Caldwell, phone interview, 5-13-02.

clearly separate from the mountain peak. The mountain range Jabal al Lawz has such a plateau²⁸⁰ (Fig. 27). Other eyewitnesses confirm this statement.²⁸¹

This may not be the location on the mountain that would have hosted this event; yet, it seems a likely spot. At the sight of God, one would expect the elders to fall to the ground in worship. If they indeed responded this way, this area would be very accommodating.

An indication that this location was not at the peak of the mountain, but somewhere below is seen in verses 17 and 18. Moses ascended into the midst of the cloud of God's glory from where he left the elders and the seventh verse says "the sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the *top* of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel." It is also pertinent to note in this verse that Moses did not enter the fire which was on the mountain in 20:18, but that the cloud of His Glory appeared or *looked like fire* to the nation of Israel below.

Plateaus of this kind are doubtless plentiful in the mountains of the region. Yet, among the other evidences presented, this, still another compliance with the Biblical record, has some significance in the support of this thesis.

g. The Trees of Lawz

There has been some debate about the climate and the vegetation in the Late Bronze Age versus the climate in modern times in the environs

²⁸⁰ Moller, 260.

²⁸¹ Caldwell, phone interview, 5-13-02, Penny Caldwell roughly estimated that you could put 500 people up on this plateau.



Fig.27. Plateau on Makla. Courtesy of the Caldwell's. Arrow compliments of Lennart Moller, The Exodus Case, 260.

of the Wilderness Wanderings and Mt. Sinai. Har-el discusses these issues in his book The Sinai Journeys. It is clear that Moses was instructed by God to make various articles for the Tabernacle of *acacia wood* (Exodus 25:1ff). There are many species of acacia, most of which are in Australia, and the next largest presence in Africa. It is likely the species used by Moses was *Acacia seyal* or *Shittim Wood*. “According to some Biblical scholars, the Shittah tree is mentioned in the Bible only once [*I will plant in the wilderness [...] the Shittah tree*. Isaiah 41], but its wood is referred to many times as shittium, which is the plural of shittah in Hebrew. Some feel that it was only natural that Moses should turn to shittium when he came to build the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle and needed beams and timber. No one can be sure which species of Acacia was meant.”²⁸² Shittium or Acacia trees are found in the Sinai Peninsula and around Jabal al Lawz. Harrison points out: “The presence of acacia trees nearby [near Jabal al Lawz] is not unusual. Acacia trees can be found here and there all over these southern deserts, including the Sinai Peninsula and southern Israel. In fact, they are the only hardwood trees found in these deserts, which is why they used them for the Tabernacle.”²⁸³

The point by Harrison is well taken. It is important that acacia trees be near any site that one claims is Mt. Sinai. Yet, the absence of the tree would not prove that the mountain is not authentic. The supply in the area could have been completely harvested at any given point in history by any

²⁸² James A. Duke, “Acacia seyal Del,” 5 May 2001. Center for New Crops and Plant Products- Purdue University, 5 May 2001. <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/duke_Acacia_seyal.html>

²⁸³ Harrison, 3.

Bedouin population or transient. However, as hearty a tree as this one is, it seems the species would survive the millenniums. Thus, the presence of an acacia species in the environs of the al Lawz range is helpful toward this thesis, but is not in itself a proof that Jabal al Lawz is Mt. Sinai.

Another tree growing at the site is the almond tree. The name of the mountain itself, Jabal al Lawz means “Mountain of Almonds.”

Eyewitnesses Jim and Penny Caldwell say they have seen almond trees in the immediate vicinity of what supporters of the Lawz/Sinai thesis call *the holy precinct*.²⁸⁴ They have picked up almond branches in the area around the mountain on the eastern side of the range. They did not find any trees on the western side [Rephidim] of the range. Almond trees must have been common for many centuries on this mountain as the name implies.

On one of the high ridges of Maqla, between two boulders grows a tree. “The tree on the peak is how it [the mountain] is identified locally, since there is no other mountain in the area with a tree on the top.”²⁸⁵ The

²⁸⁴ In Fig. 28 a diagram of the Holy Precinct is drawn. This drawing is helpful to get a *basic* orientation of the area. Several of the structures depicted in the drawing are up for debate. Later in the thesis these structures will be discussed. Also, the blackened peak extends along to the north. This is called “holy” because it is here where one finds what is believed to be the altar that Moses built at the foot of the mountain, as well as the “12 pillars,” the mountain streambed, the alleged “Altar of the Golden Calf Site,” and other curiosities. The mountains of Lawz and Maqla form a natural amphitheater to the east that protects and surrounds this “holy precinct.” These various archaeological remains will be examined later in this thesis. The Caldwells’ testimony was received in a phone interview on May 13, 2002.

²⁸⁵ Moller, 269. Moller speculates on the age of this tree. He makes the point that olive trees can live thousands of years. He then quotes the Quran where it says, “. . .and a tree issuing from Sinai that bears oil and seasoning for all to eat.” He says that this may be symbolic, and refer to the “life” that springs forth from Sinai. Moller also speculates that since Mohammed traveled in the general vicinity and that he may have seen this tree on the mountain and may have believed that Lawz was Sinai. A problem with this idea is that Mohammed seemed to believe the traditional site was the true site as he ordered the monks in residence at Jebel Musa not to be harmed during a Muslim raid in the area. Actually, according to

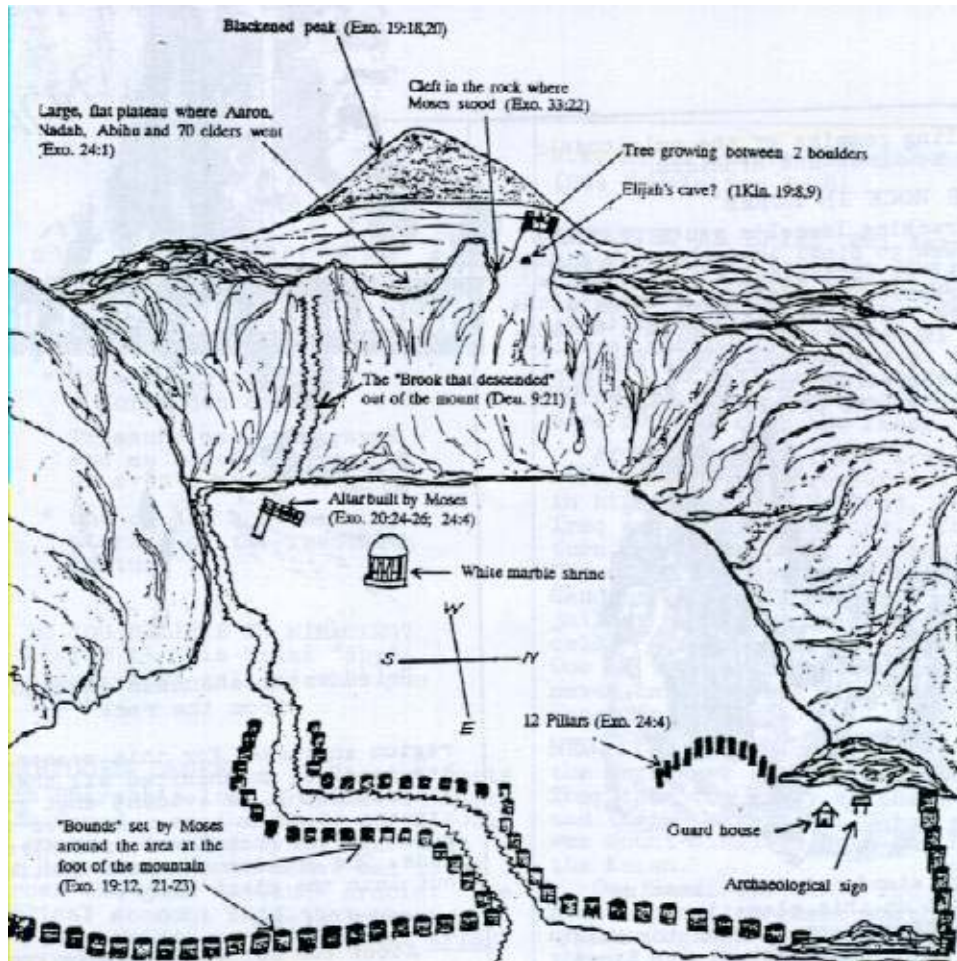


Fig. 28. Basic Sketch of "Holy Precinct." Jonathan Gray, 27.

Caldwells have positively identified the tree as an almond tree (Fig. 26). Phenomenon like this may have contributed to the naming of the mountain. It is interesting to note that when Moses was in the Mount in Exodus 25, that the Lord instructed Moses to use the pattern of the almond blossom for the Golden Lamp stand. Indeed to have a visual aid for Moses and the artisans would have been helpful. The Caldwell's have photos of almond trees in full bloom from the immediate environs of the mountain. In verse 40, the Lord says to Moses, "*And see to it that you make them [the arms of the Lamp stand with an almond blossom design] according to the pattern which was shown you on the mount.*" Could an almond tree have been on the mount that God used to show Moses? Or was God just referring to His verbal description of the pattern for the lampstand? It would seem helpful to at least have some trees in the vicinity to use as models for the craftsman.

Once again, the presence of almond trees in the vicinity and on a peak of the mountain is not in itself conclusive evidence for this thesis, nor the absence of them at the traditional site. Time may have not preserved the trees due to weather, human intervention, or death due to aging. Yet, one might conclude for the reasons listed above, that it might lend some weight to mounting evidence. Moses and the artisan had seen enough almond trees to sculpt the pattern, but for any artist, it is nice to have a perfect model from which to work.

eyewitnesses, the tree is an almond tree, and may have had something to do with the naming of the mountain if indeed almond trees are so enduring and stable in such environments.

Yet another unusual phenomenon was observed by the Caldwells and documented by video and photographs.²⁸⁶ On their sixth visit to the site, they were searching for a path to the top of the “Brown Lawz.”²⁸⁷ As they were climbing toward the very inaccessible heights they came to a high pasture in between the two summits. In this saddle-like meadow was a lot of vegetation for flocks and was frequented by Bedouin shepherds. This was the west side of the range. This would fit the description in Exodus 3:1-3, where Moses took the flocks of Jethro to the “back of the desert,” which would be east of Jethro’s home in the area of al Bad mentioned above.

As the Caldwells scanned the slope they noticed about 300 feet up the slope, on a lower peak of Lawz at the edge of the pasture, three trees all attached by the same root system. They were cedar trees. One was very large and evidently quite ancient. The presence of cedar trees in desert regions is hardly rare. However, with the Caldwells’ extensive travel in the region they felt the size of these trees and their apparent age, an oddity.

A core sample taken from a cedar tree in the up state New York, determined that a tree 4-6 inches thick to be 800-900 years old. This cedar on Lawz, with a fraction of the moisture enjoyed by the tree in New York was around five to eight feet thick at the very bottom of tree and had seven major branch/trunks on the tree. This tree could have been alive at the time

²⁸⁶ On August 8 and 9, an extensive interview was conducted by this author with Jim and Penny Caldwell, at their home. The interviews were taped and videotapes were copied for further examination.

²⁸⁷ The Caldwells say the northern peak of the Lawz range is called the “Brown Lawz,” because it is indeed all brownish granite, while the lower sister peak, across the valley is “Black Lawz” as it is covered with the greenstone and blackened granite.

of Moses. Could this tree be a candidate for the tree used by God to burn but not be consumed? Of course there is no way to verify this hypothesis, and unless this is a core sample taken, the age can only be estimated. The “burning bush” may not be alive today and may have perished soon after its use by Jehovah. Yet, because it was not consumed by the fire, it is possible, depending on the species of tree, that it might exist somewhere in the vicinity. This natural phenomenon is submitted for speculation.²⁸⁸

From the Biblical account one can expect certain natural features and phenomenon in the environs of Mt. Sinai/Horeb. One might expect a prominent “split rock” in the area just preceding Israel’s move into the wilderness of Sinai. At the base of the mountain, one might expect some indication of a streambed that flowed from the top of the mountain. One might expect a cave on the mountainside, and a plateau that could accommodate at least 74 people. There should be room for over a million people to camp near the base of the mountain, and one might think there would be some lasting effect from a furnace-like heat from the LORD burning hot enough to produce fire and smoke on the top of the mountain. Finally one might expect to find acacia and almond trees in the vicinity of the mountain, if indeed they might survive as a species in the area. The site of Jabal al Lawz has fulfilled these aspects of the Biblical accounts. Some questions may be raised whether the effects of Jehovah’s fire on the mountain would leave its present black top. There *is* room for a

²⁸⁸ Josephus’ opinion about the bush is that it was a fruit bush of some sort: “...for a fire fed upon a thorn-bush, yet did the green leaves and the flowers continue untouched, and the fire did not at all consume the fruit-branches, although the flame was great and fierce,” Josephus, 59.

completely natural explanation for it. Yet, as noted above, an explanation of this feature in geologic terms resulting from supernatural intervention is not completely out of the question. Of course one's worldview must include the supernatural.

The seven features described above, taken together, enhance the likelihood that Jabal al Lawz is the Biblical Mt. Sinai.

5. The Testimony of Ancient Structures

As with the study of the rock art, inscriptions, and natural features of the environs of Jabal al Lawz, there are few sources available that offer first-hand exposure to and study of the ancient structures in the area. The primary sources available are the photo/video documentation and testimonies of Jim and Penny Caldwell and the archaeologists of the Department of Antiquities and Museums of Saudi Arabia. There are other Westerners who have visited the site and will be cited from time to time. However, as noted earlier, no Westerners have had more first-hand exposure to Jabal al Lawz, and the surrounding area as the Caldwells. Their meticulous documentation of what they observed and their regular consultation with experts to evaluate their findings, makes their contributions to this study strategic. The findings of the Saudis are also very important. They obviously have unhindered access to the site, and insights into the local traditions and history that warrant any researchers serious consideration. However, the Saudis' conclusions are not above criticism and accountability. There is enough information available from other sources to avoid being totally dependent on the Saudi conclusions.

There are also reliable Western sources that attest to the Saudis' tampering with various archaeological sites in order to remove evidence that may contradict the Saudi/Islamic view of history.²⁸⁹

It is the intention of this author, however, to present the evidence as objectively as possible from the sources available. As noted earlier, bias is hard to overcome for any student/researcher that is attempting to give evidence for a particular thesis.

a. Wells/Cisterns/Filters or Cairns

In the area directly below the summit of Maqla, called the Holy Precinct earlier, there are evidently some circular structures. Quoting Cornuke:

Each structure was comprised of three large rings, not unlike the outer bark of a colossal redwood, forming exterior walls two-and-a-half feet thick. They measured eighteen feet in diameter, spaced five feet apart – and there were exactly twelve of them. But they weren't pillars. They looked more like ceremonial platforms or perhaps large cisterns. They lay at the bottom of the ancient riverbed we'd seen before, so perhaps they once served as water storage reservoirs for the Hebrew tribes."²⁹⁰

Lennart Moller and Ron Wyatt had the opinion that they were wells and water filters, which extended along the *lake* [a theory addressed above in

²⁸⁹ This allegation can be documented, but the source is concerned about possible reprisals.

²⁹⁰ Cornuke, 124.

the section on natural features] bordering the holy precinct. They felt that as water flowed down from the mountain, the water would seep into the double walls of the wells, and would be purified to some extent.²⁹¹ Moller illustrates the placement of the “wells” with black dots around the proposed lakebed in the photo (Fig. 29). Gordon Franz’s summary of this topic is helpful:

To add some confusion to the finds in the area, Wyatt and Fasold found large circular structures some 18 ft in diameter in the immediate area (Williams 1990: 208-10; picture 3; Cornuke and Holbrook 2000: 124). Williams (1990: picture 3) says they are the twelve pillars representing the tribes of Israel, but Cornuke discounts that and says they are either ceremonial platforms or large cisterns (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000:124).²⁹² From the photographs and drawings, they look to me like cairns, large stone circles probably connected with burials that are typical to the northwest Saudi Arabian area. The date and function of the cairns is unknown (Ingraham et al. 1981: 69-71). I would also put the so-called ‘boundary stones’ (Exodus 19:12) in the same category (Williams 1990: 63;

²⁹¹ Gray, 63; Moller, 262.

²⁹² Cornuke also thought they may have serve as water storage reservoirs for the Hebrews, 124.



Fig. 29. Proposed Well and Well System. Moller, 262.
Photo courtesy of Jim and Penny Caldwell.

Cornuke and Holbrook 2000: 85, 86; pl. 10 bottom; Blum 1998a: pl. 6 bottom).”²⁹³

It is interesting that the Saudi archaeologists make no mention of these structures. The Caldwells also made several trips to this area looking for these man-made structures, and found nothing like what was described above. Concerning the idea of them being filters the Caldwells comment: “They [Israel] would not have needed to filter water coming out of the mountain, it was pure as it ran through the camp and would accommodate thousands all along the streambed as it meandered down the plain.”²⁹⁴ The Caldwells have identified wells in the general area, very similar to wells they have seen in the Eastern Province. The wells that they did see had no resemblance to burial cairns. They spent much time investigating burial cairns and various wells and saw no likeness between the two. South of Maqla one will see deep wells, but these depicted in the photos and drawings provided above, look to the Caldwells like the beginnings of well digging or dried up wells that were subsequently filled in.

It seems that there must be some of these circular structures in the vicinity of the “holy precinct,” but the best sources for verification were not able to find them. The Saudis either found the structures were not worthy to include in their report or they did not find them. However, they do mention large circular structures in this area that are very different than the structures described above (Fig.30). They concluded that these

²⁹³ Franz, 111.

²⁹⁴ Caldwells, interview, August, 2002.



Fig. 30. Circular Structures at Jebel el Lawz. Al-Ansary, photo 67.

structures could been “used by Bedouins for keeping animals.”²⁹⁵ It is interesting to note that these were located by the guardhouse near the main gate, similar to where some of the well-like circular structures were said to be by some of the other witnesses. These however were 9 meters [nearly 30 feet] across, while the other “wells” were said to be 18 feet across. The design of these structures seems to be much different as well.

Since there is uncertainty as to the location or even existence of these wells, or water filters, the significance of these structures for this thesis is small. By examining the photos and drawings, the Caldwells feel if they do exist, they probably have no relevance to the Mosaic era.

b. Boundary Markers - Exodus 19:12

As far as the boundary markers are concerned, the piles of rocks presented by some as markers and the well-like structures as markers by others, are questioned by the Caldwells. Bob Cornuke mentioned piles of rock at 400-yard intervals in a perfect semicircle around the mountain²⁹⁶(Fig. 31). The Caldwells make the point that it would be unwise to put bounds in this area alone because the area is such a small part of the whole vast mountain. These boundary markers would have excluded most of the mountain. Moller proposed that the several stones at the base of Jabal al Lawz with the petroglyphs of *untied* sandals (Fig. 21), marked a holy spot.²⁹⁷ However, these were not in any perceivable line around the mountain. It was also pointed out by the Caldwells, that if the

²⁹⁵ Al –Ansary, 68.

²⁹⁶ Cornuke, 85.

²⁹⁷ Moller, 257.



Fig. 31. Proposed Boundary Markers. Cornuke.

boundary markers were out in the valley of the holy precinct, and the altar site for sacrifice was at the foot of the mountain, then those bringing oxen to slaughter at Moses' altar would be in violation of the boundary.

The Caldwells believe that there are marks somewhere around the base, as they have seen from time to time a block of stone standing up, yet without any order or sequence. The Saudis make no mention of this subject, as there is no distinctive pattern or placement of any kind of markers that would draw their attention. Again, there does not seem to be any boundary markers in a distinct pattern around the mountain. However, this does not mean they are not there or are not represented by a few lone markers.

c. Stone Circles

As noted in the section presenting the natural features of the site, the topography surrounding Jabal al Lawz/Maqla would adequately accommodate 600,000 men and their families. On the west side of Lawz/Maqla, where Israel camped at Rephidim and drank from the Split Rock at Meribah, there is a vast plain, and according to Dr. Glen Fritz, many stone circles and burial cairns (Fig. 32). Saudi archaeologists had the following to say about these structures:

Stone circles are a common feature located in the deserts of Arabia, in valleys on the top and at the base of hills and mountains. These are reported by various survey teams and archaeologists such as Robert McAdams, Peter Parr et al



Fig. 32. Stone Circles West of Jebel el Lawz.
Photos by Jim and Penny Caldwell.

(1977:32-40); Peter Parr and Zarins et al (1978:29-50) and Michael Ingraham et al (1981:59-81). ‘A total of sixty sites with a variety of stone cairns, piles, and circular enclosures were found in the Northwestern Province. These ubiquitous sites represent the majority of the sites located during the survey. Their date and function are difficult to assess’ (Ingraham et al 1981:69).²⁹⁸

The relevance of these structures to the visiting ancient Hebrews is that many of them may have been constructed as temporary dwellings for themselves or their animals. Lennart Moller illustrates the possible use of some of these circular structures (Fig. 33). In Exodus 19:2 it says: “When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain.” It was concluded by Ingraham in the quote above that the date and function of these circles were difficult to assess, therefore their use would not exclude camp homes of Israel in the time of the Exodus. Yet, consider the comments of the Saudi archaeologists: “Thus the stone circles found at the foot of Jebel el-Lawz are not the only ones, they are similar to those found almost everywhere in the Kingdom. *As no archaeological material that may help date the stone structures* at Jebel el-Lawz was found, they *seem* to be either earlier than those found in other parts of the Kingdom, or they were created in the recent past by the Bedouins as enclosure for their animals” [emphasis added]. It is curious that there is no

²⁹⁸ Al-Ansary, 80-81.



Fig. 33. Proposed Camp or Hut Circle. Moller, 256.

evidence to date these structures, but they venture to guess, and they guess it is not from the time of Moses.

The Caldwells have reasoned that some of the structures on the western side of Jabal al Lawz are possibly Amalakite. They also feel that Moller's illustration of a camp circle in Fig. 30 is more appropriate for the circular structures on the west side of the slopes of Jabal al Lawz with the large more permanent stones. The circles with the smaller unhewn rock [field stones] seem more like the Bedouin style structures as they represent less effort to build for a nomadic people. With the brevity of Israel's stay on the western side, it would stand to reason that they would not build hand-hewn large rock hut-circles. Many of the circles on the western side have "standing-stone thresholds" according to the Caldwells, again making them distinct from the structures on the eastern side (Fig. 34).

Exodus 17:8 says Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. Most scholars would not put the Amalekites living this far south. The thought that they came to meet Israel at this location to intercept them on their march toward Canaan is plausible. The Amalekites did not have to live here to have fought Moses here. But the observations of the Caldwells that some cult worship site and community were established in this area, has found scholarly consideration.²⁹⁹

Israel's longer stay at Sinai would be their camp stop after Rephidim, as they traveled to the eastern side of Jabal al Lawz/Maqla,

²⁹⁹ In a phone interview on December 9, 2002, Dr. Glen Fritz recognized the possibility of the area around the Split Rock being a cult-worship site. The Caldwells have also consulted with other scholars on the subject.



Fig. 34. Circles with Large Stones and Thresholds. Photo by Jim and Penny Caldwell.

where the *Holy Precinct or Covenant Site* is found. One would expect some evidence of camping by a huge mass of people with the prolonged stay they experienced there. From extensive observation of the vast plains that extend in all directions from the eastern slopes of the Lawz/Maqla range, the Caldwells documented hundred and hundreds of camp-circles with the small stones. Does this prove they were used by Israel in the Mosaic times? No, but since dating is so inexact, it still remains a possibility. Once again, if this is the site of Mt. Sinai, there must be room to camp for as many as two million people, and one might expect some structural evidence of a nine-month camp. These structures could very possibly be that evidence.

d. The Graveyard

In Exodus 32, after the idolatrous rebellion of the sons of Israel with the Golden Calf, the Levites killed 3000 men at the word of Moses (verse 28). Then a plague killed 20,000 more as recorded in verse 35, and the number dead is recorded in I Corinthians 10:8. What was done with 23,000 dead Hebrews? It would stand to reason that these rebellious idolaters would be taken away from the *Holy Precinct* to the outskirts of the camp and buried, as their bodies would defile them (Leviticus 21).

Approximately 3-4 miles north of the Holy Precinct there is another fenced-in area that is not mentioned in the site survey done by the Saudi archaeologists. Jim and Penny Caldwell may be the only Westerners who have been to this site in recent times. Strewn across an area about

three to four hundred yards across, are what appear to be graves with upright stones as headstones. There are no epitaphs on the headstones. There are many hundreds of them according to the Caldwells.³⁰⁰ The Caldwells have photo documentation of the site and feel quite firmly that it is some sort of mass burial site. They also stated that it could not be Islamic graves as headstones are usually forbidden. Upon their first visit to the site what drew their attention was some stones sitting upright above the bush level. They did notice some sign of “rows,” and some were laid out in rectangles or squares. These were not mounds or cairns. They also stood by a very large stone, that seemed to be hewn somewhat.

The Caldwells reasoned that perhaps each headstone represented more than one person, perhaps families, or various members of a certain tribe. The absence of any identification on the headstones would stand to reason if these represented the graves of those who rejected Jehovah for idols.

Dr. Fritz has received close-up satellite images of this site and after studying them has concluded, by the style of disruption on the surface, and the shape of the structures that this site may contain thousands of graves that seem to have been dug at the same time.

Is this the graveyard of those who rebelled in the Golden Calf incident? It may be the only site for Mt. Sinai that has what seems to be an ancient cemetery with thousands graves. More information from the

³⁰⁰ Jim and Penny Caldwell, interview at their home, August 2002.

Saudis would be helpful. Until then, the explanation for the site given in this section, is viable.

e. Jehovahnissi Altar

In Exodus 17:15, Moses built an altar of testimony to God for the defeat of the Amalekites at Rephidim. According to Ron Wyatt, just a few hundred feet away from “the rock at Horeb,” is this altar. “It appears to be between 20 and 25 feet long, and perhaps 15 feet deep. Its height is 3 to 4 feet. There is no doubt in our minds that the structure in the photo at left is the altar Moses called Jehovahnissi.” Moller is not quite so definite, but points out that the location of the altar would comply with the Biblical account. He also provides a photo of the altar³⁰¹(Fig. 35).

The Caldwelles do not believe this is the Jehovahnissi altar. They have a possible site of their own. In their extensive travels around the Middle East, they examined structures that were built during the Ottoman Empire in the late 1700’s to early 1900’s. “They [Ottomans] came in and built a type of structure that had a certain look. It had shallow stones stacked on top of each other. They are somewhat cut, but no chisel marks can be found. They may be sheared as granite will shear.”³⁰² Thus, the Caldwelles see this as a more recent structure from the Ottoman style of building. The Saudi site survey did not address this structure.

³⁰¹ Moller, 248.

³⁰² Caldwell, August, 2002.



Fig. 35. Jehovahnissi Altar. Photo by Jim and Penny Caldwell.

Why this structure was built is uncertain, but it is not likely an altar built by Moses. Though its location would fit the Biblical account, the style of construction seems to betray a much later era.

f. Kilns

A brief mention of the presence of kilns found in the area is worthwhile. Jeffery Harrison, mentioned earlier, who wrote an article to refute the conclusions of the video, “The Search for the Real Mt. Sinai,” says that “ kilns found on the site are not evidence of a brief visit of the Israelites, but a long-term occupation of the site, perhaps for the purpose of mining ore.”³⁰³ This may comply with the Caldwell’s theory of a long-term occupation of a cult-worship group, as they found what they thought was a kiln on the western side of Lawz/Maqla. They said the walls of this particular structure were very thick and circular in form, a square open center area that could supply some hot fires.

The short stay of Israel on the western plains of Lawz, probably would not warrant the building of kilns.

g. Altar and Pillars of Moses or Residence for Quarry Workers

After Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord, all the ordinances, and doubtless many practical instructions; Exodus 24: 4 says, “Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at *the foot* of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.” Despite the fact that the Scripture is silent concerning the help Moses had in building this altar and pillars, it is likely, being over eighty years old, such a task

³⁰³ Harrison, p. 3

would not be attempted alone. It is also true, in Exodus 40, that Moses is said to have “erected the court all around the tabernacle [as well as the entire tabernacle] and the altar, and hung the veil for the gateway of the court.” Obviously it meant that he supervised the setting up of the Tabernacle. Thus, in 24:4, it was also likely a project involving many men. The structure at the foot of Jabal al Lawz would have taken more than one man to build. In verse five, the involvement of some *men* of Israel is mentioned as he instructs them to offer young bulls on the altar as Peace Offerings to the Lord. Also, in Exodus 20:24-21:1, God says in verse 24 that He wanted Moses to make an altar of *earth* for Him. However, later in verse 25, He gives Moses the option of using uncut stones. Jim Caldwell has identified a section of the structure, as the reader will see illustrated in Fig. 42a, which could be the earthen altar for burning. Yet, if the altar for burning were elsewhere in the structure, it would be made of uncut stones, which is in line with the Jehovah’s instructions. Also, the Lord required that no steps lead up to the altar; this is indeed the case with this structure at this site.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ In a recent unpublished article by Penny Caldwell, she describes the portion of the structure at the end of the long angled corridors or cattle chutes (See Figs 42a & 42b). This she and her husband Jim believe is the altar area where “the young men of Israel did the sacrificing: “Having now established an effective chute on the site, the connecting structures must be related to establish a working system of sacrifice. The first rectangular structure attached to the cattle chute is the perfect size to hold one ox at a time for literal slaughter. Directly in front of the slaughter platform is the huge stone with step down access to the streambed below. This would have been necessary to wash and prepare the holocaust, and to wash after the slaughter. Turning then to the right, the priest would have reached over the knee-high wall of stone and set the sacrifice onto the earthen altar for burning. Strangely enough, right next to this access area, a pit has been constructed that is visibly layered with ash. If this were indeed a working earthen altar, it would have had to be scraped repeatedly to continue placing fresh sacrifices on it for burning. The ash and whatever remained of the animal parts would have to be removed somewhere. Isn’t it interesting that right next to this slaughter pit and access area is a pit full of just such material.” Penny Caldwell, Field Report – At the Base of Jebel Maqla, 2002.

The word for “foot” of the mountain is the word “*tachath*” from the same word for “to depress,” meaning the bottom (as depressed). Idiomatically, “beneath plus flat” supports the translation “at the foot” of the mountain. The “foot” meaning where the general descent stops and flattens out into a plain. Figure 36 shows this structure right at the convergence of the mountain and the plain, the close-up photo is taken standing upon the quickly ascending mountainside. Therefore, whatever this structure is it fits the Biblical location for the altar of Moses perfectly. The Saudis also locate the structure “at the foot of Jabal al Lawz on the eastern side, over looking Wadi al Abyad.”³⁰⁵ The following is a general description of the site by the Saude excavation team:

After the clearing process, it appeared that the building was composed of seven sections (Fig. 37) built with different size of granite stones in addition to other natural stones from the base of the mountain were also used in the building. The building is L-shaped forming an obtuse angle. There are four rooms in the building (1 to 4), with an open area (no. 5) in front of these rooms. A long corridor is attached to the rooms at the southeastern side; it is divided by a wall into two sections (no. 6,7) at the centre. The walls of the building are 70cm thick [2.3ft]; the height of the remaining wall varies from 50 to 100cm [1.64 to

³⁰⁵ Al-Ansary, 63.



Fig. 36. Near and Far Views of Altar. Photos by Jim and Penny Caldwell. Arrow by Lennart Moller, 258.

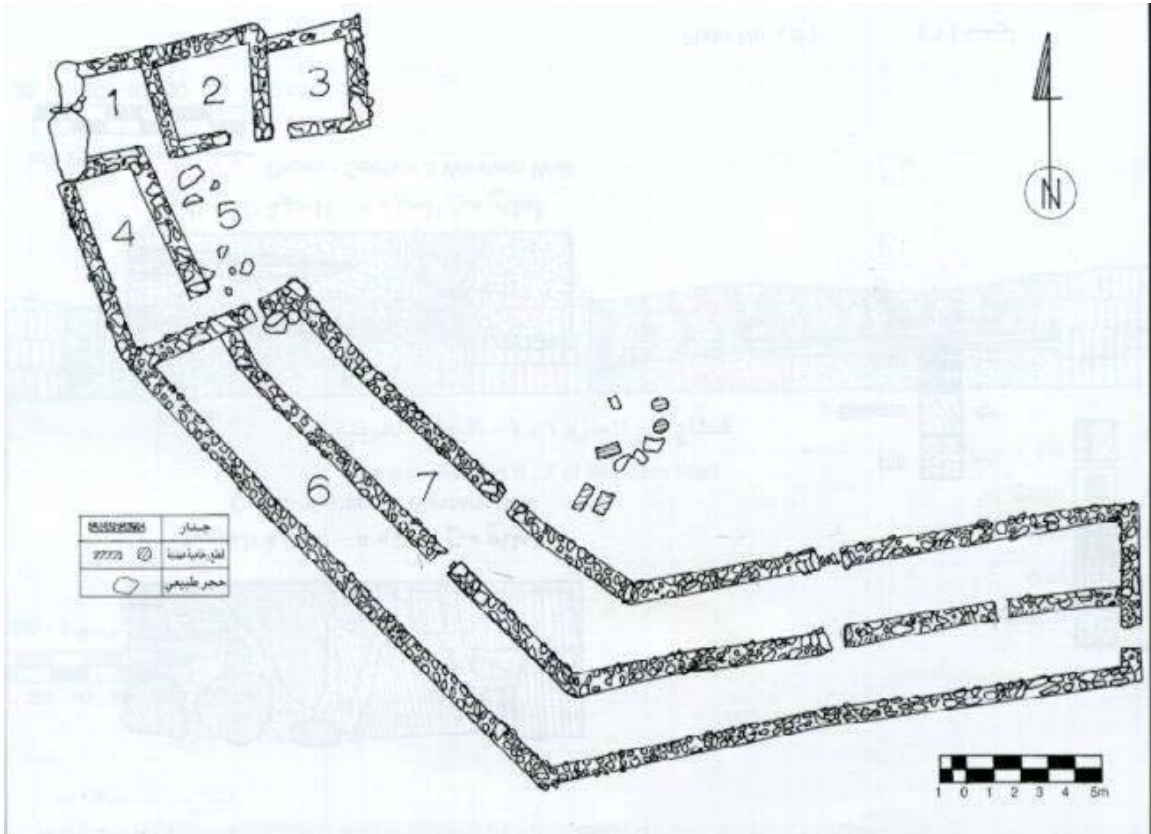


Fig. 37. Saudi Diagram of Quarry Residence or Altar. Al-Ansary, pl. 5.

3.28ft].”³⁰⁶ Also, in a flat area extending out from inside angled wall are several discarded marble stone columns scattered on the surface. There are also some rectangular stone portions scattered about as well. The cylindrical and round shaped stones are 30cm [11.81in], and 65cm [2.13 ft] in length. The rectangular stones found here by Saudi measurement were 10x35cm [3.94 in. x 1.15 ft].

The Saudi archaeologists also found what they believe to be a paved track leading up the mountain to a marble quarry at the top of Jabal al Lawz. The track named Aba al-‘Ajal road, is 3-3.5m [around 10 to 11.5ft] wide. Only “some parts of it are still preserved and can be seen heading from the southern side of the wadi to the northern part of it. It is evident that the route was fully paved with stones, but some large rocks have fallen on it”³⁰⁷ (Fig.38). From the photo it appears merely to be a wadi. There is not a photo of any portion of a ten foot wide paved section of track or road in the book. The following is the Caldwell’s response to the idea of a tract leading up the mountain:

In all the visits we made to this site, we saw absolutely no evidence whatsoever of a wide stone track leading to the hilltop. The photograph referred to in the report (Fig.51) was taken from an upper vantage point on Jebel el Maqla, in a place that we are quite familiar with. Under the

³⁰⁶ Al-Ansary, 64.

³⁰⁷ Al-Ansary, 70.



Fig. 38. Proposed Paved Track for Marble Workers, photo 68.

photograph, the explanation is as follows: ‘Track leading to the peak of Jabal al Lawz.’ This statement is incorrect in two ways: this is not Jebel al Lawz, and there is no track shown here. Practically, it must be taken into consideration that the terrain up at this elevation is both sharply rugged and steep, and it would have been an enormous undertaking to construct such a road up the side of this mountain. As you can see by close examination of their photo, there is no stone track visible in the picture.³⁰⁸

Also, for animals to navigate such a sharp angled tract with a load would be precarious at best.

The Saudis believe that the cylindrical and rectangular marble stones that lay near the structure, were mined at a quarry that is at 2400 meters above sea level. A second quarry is mentioned at 2500 meters, but is no quarry at all as there is no signs of stone cutting activity there.³⁰⁹ It is believed by the Saudis that the workers brought the quarried marble down to the structure at the foot of the mountain by perhaps mules and carts [concluded due to the name of the track given by the natives].³¹⁰ They believe that due to the shape of the stones they were ready for transportation and exportation upon arrival at the “workers residence” at the base. Because there were worked and unworked stones around the

³⁰⁸ Penny Caldwell, Analysis of Saudi Archaeological Surveys Conducted at Jebel al Lawz. Unpublished paper. January 2002.

³⁰⁹ Al-Alsary, 71.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

building at the base, among other reasons, the structure was the residence of the workers of the quarry, for storage and where they kept the animals used for transportation. Due to the quantity of “organic material” found in the floor of the structure and some pottery dating from the Roman/Nabataean Period, they concluded that the structure was a residential site and the marble, *without doubt*, [emphasis added] are attributed to the Nabataean Period[...]and that the marble columns made on the summit of the mountain were not used on the site, but were exported outside Jabal al Lawz to Petra (Jordan), the Nabataean capitol city, or to Madain Saleh in the northwest of the Kingdom.³¹¹

It would be important to look at several points regarding the idea of this being a quarry site for Romans, Nabataeans, or another group.

This quarry would be a major investment of time, money and energy for any profit-seeking entity to travel 2400 meters high to a remote mountain location, off the beaten path, when there are quarries in much more substantial and convenient places to export to far away places. Besides the travel up the mountain, and the building of a 16ft x16ft house for the workers and their equipment at 2400 feet,³¹² and then a 115 ft structure at the base for workers, animals, and storage, would describe a very unwise merchant. According to the Saudis there was not much mining of the cylindrical and rectangular stones done up there anyway.

³¹¹ In an interview in August of 2002, the Caldwells stated on their three trips to Petra, after scouring the area over and over, they have never seen anything made from white marble that even remotely resembles a pillar.

³¹² Al-Ansary, 70-71.

Certainly, the ancients would have counted the cost of this venture and investigated it thoroughly before putting such effort and investment into the site! According to the Caldwelles and Dr. Glen Fritz, there were quarries down toward the Gulf of Aqaba that would have made much better sense for a marble cutter seeking a profit, or for a government sending in workers to mine.

Gordon Franz agrees with the Saudis on their findings so completely, that it seems he must have been a consultant for the dig.³¹³ Also, Harrison comes under Franz's influence it seems as he agrees with the Roman house theory.³¹⁴

Once again it would be wise to consult first hand witnesses of the site and their opinions. Jim Caldwell saw the site before and after excavation, documenting the structure with video and photographs. His travel to this site and all over the Middle East for over a decade comparing this structure with others in many countries, make his insights valuable. In the coming pages, another explanation for the marble pieces and the "residential structure" will be presented. The insights of the Caldwelles [which often included consultation with experts] and other individuals with knowledge of the site will be presented.

A statement from Jeffery Harrison will begin the discussion of the pillars or Roman column fragments.

³¹³ Al-Ansary, 85. Note the book's strong support of Franz' articles: "Franz's paper is based on archaeological and scientific studies and the findings of the archaeological surveys conducted in the Kingdom by American, European and Saudi archaeologists."

³¹⁴ Harrison, 3.

The ‘pillars’ referred to in Scripture (‘mazzeoth’ in Hebrew; Exodus 24:4) were rectangular stones stood up on one of their narrow ends, nothing like the modern “pillars” at all. What our guides have actually discovered are collapsed column fragments, reflecting a style of architecture well known in these deserts from the Roman Period and later, long after the time of Moses.³¹⁵

Is Mr. Harrison referring to Nabataean work in Petra and other areas?

Indeed the Scripture speaks of regular uncut “field stones” being set up as pillars in Genesis 28:18, 31:45 and 35:14. It is interesting that the Hebrew words in each of these three references describe something being set on end or raised up higher, or stationed somewhere. In Exodus 24:4, it says Moses “built” [Hebrew “*banah*”] the altar and the pillars. This verb implies more than just finding some fieldstones and turning them on end in a semi-circle.³¹⁶ It is likely that Moses put much more effort into these memorial stones at this covenant event and location. Each pillar was to represent a tribe of the people of God. There is no Biblical reason to disqualify cut marble stones set up as pillars; simple because of the type of rock or the fact that they were cut. There was no prohibition against “cut pillar stones.” Consider the testimony of the Caldwells at this point: “Israel was more than capable of working these stones and surely Moses would have set up something more elaborate than boulders for this

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ This observation was first made by Jim and Penny Caldwell in their unpublished paper, Field Report – At the Base of Jebel Maqla. January 2002.

event”³¹⁷ There is a possibility that Moses and the children of Israel did the mining themselves from the quarry site described and pictured in *Al-Bid* (Fig. 39). However, the cylindrical holes shown in Figure 39 do not necessarily prove that Moses or a later mining operation took the marble rocks from these holes. Dr. Glen Fritz makes the following statement about this photo:

While this may in fact be marble, it is highly unlikely it was quarried in the fashion of these ‘punch-out’ type holes. According to the regional quarrying techniques from the time period, the marble would have been taken from the face of the rock where accessibility would have been the greatest. Aside from that, tool marks do not appear from this vantage point. It is highly possible that these areas are natural defects in the rock called porosites.³¹⁸

Thus, there is a small outcropping of marble on the mountain, but as mentioned earlier, it is very impractical for any major mining enterprise. It may be that Moses brought the marble with him from another site. Yet, without detailed photos and analysis, or first hand examination, the site may not be out of the question as a source for Moses’ very limited project. Actually the Saudi report did say there were identical cylindrical and rectangular stones up near the “quarry site” to those found near this structure at the base. They also said that the size of the holes in Fig. 39

³¹⁷ Interview with Caldwell, August, 2002.

³¹⁸ Penny Caldwell, *A Review of Al-Bid ‘ (History and Archaeology)*, Unpublished article, January, 2003. Dr. Fritz’ quote was found in the text.



Fig. 39. Proposed Marble Quarry. Al-Ansary, photo 48.

were similar to the diameter of the stones found at the base.³¹⁹ Once again, the number of holes, pieces, and other key information not included in the study would shed light on whether Moses may have mined the rock for these pillars from this small outcropping. There would not have to be twelve perfect holes, to give evidence that Moses mined here as there may have been some trial and error in the cutting process. Fewer than twelve “punch-holes” still may not disprove the theory.

Jim Caldwell, upon examining the pieces of marble, noted that they were the same diameter but different lengths (Fig. 40). Jim also noted that the pillars were not “pinned” [for dowels], as most columns are to keep them in place on top of one another. “All throughout Egypt and Jordan columns are made up of pinned pieces, or other methodologies to hold the column pieces together.”³²⁰ One might say of these column pieces, if indeed that is what they were going to be, could have been pinned for dowels elsewhere. On the other hand, it does make one wonder why these pieces made it from the quarry site to the shipping site and were not shipped to their intended destination if indeed they were meant to leave the site in the first place.

At this point the “shrine” theory should be mentioned. Both Ron Wyatt and Lennart Moller present this view to explain the marble pieces. Wyatt said there were at least ten pieces of broken round columns at around 23 inches in diameter, which varied in height from 8 inches to 26

³¹⁹ Al-Anasry, 71.

³²⁰ Interview with the Caldwells, August, 2002.



Fig. 40. Circular Stones/Pillars in Holy Precinct. Al-Ansary, photo 49.

inches. He also described the rectangular pieces as 8 ¼ in x 16 ½ inches and from 10 to 26 inches long.³²¹ Wyatt evidently conceived of this shrine (Fig. 41) by imagining all these pieces in column form and the rectangular pieces as part of a dome held aloft by the columns. He feels Solomon erected this shrine. Evidently Ron had help in conceiving the idea of a temple by some local Bedouins who said something about it being built by the Turk Suleyman the Magnificent of the 1500's, but Ron thought that sounded enough like Solomon to make his theory. The Bedouins also were quoted as saying that the shrine had been dismantled years earlier, and the marble used in the construction of a Mosque in Haql.³²² In Moller's description, he argues that the marble was brought into the area. He assumed there was no marble in the area. Moller's statement is of special interest: "The person who organized this must have had large resources to procure marble, transport it to the place and build this monument here." He also said "marble is too expensive to produce."³²³

There are several areas of concern with the "shrine theory." Once again, there is no indication these pieces were used as columns at this site. One concern is that there are no dowel holes in the pieces and the variation in the length of each piece is not typical of column construction. In

³²¹ Gray, 59. There is a discrepancy between the size of the marble pieces described by the Saudi's, Wyatt, and the

Caldwells. The Caldwells and Wyatt agree on the thickness of the pieces at 22-23 inches. The Saudis claimed 30cm or 11.81 inches. Wyatt claims the height or length of the pieces were from 8 inches to 26, the Caldwells from 14 inches to 32, and the Saudis up to 25 inches. The rectangular pieces were measured in different ways, so it is difficult to compare the measurements. The Caldwells feel that the marble pieces have been broken and chipped at by later inhabitants or transients. The color of the chipped spots and the impact markings betray this.

³²² Gray, 59.

³²³ Moller, 266.



Fig. 41. Proposed Shrine in the Holy Precinct.
Moller, 266.

addition, since there are not enough pieces present to make the shrine that is pictured, the Bedouin “tip” on what happened to the remaining pieces is much too convenient. Also, following Wyatt and Moller’s reasoning, there is no proof that Solomon built pillars at an alleged crossing site opposite Nuweiba on the Gulf of Aqaba to commemorate the crossing site, and then went up to this area and built a shrine at the site of Moses altar. A point well taken from Moller is that someone would have to be wealthy to get marble up to the Lawz location, and build such a shrine. One would also have expected great returns on their efforts to make it worthwhile to mine a small outcropping of marble at 2400 meters, and deliver it to their clients. If this was a marble mine, the merchant lost a fortune in this investment, not long into the endeavor. Certainly no government would fund such a quarry with the potential for such miniscule returns.

The Caldwells have considered several theories regarding the use of these quarried pieces of marble as pillars, considering as well what may have been damaged or carried off in subsequent times. Assuming the pieces were meant for this spot, and considering the form and position they lay in the dirt, Jim believes they could have been set up in an approximate 20ft x 20ft square. He believes that the rectangular pieces could have been laid down as a foundation by Moses, forming a square platform for the pillars of varying length to sit on (Fig.42a). With the pieces present and the layout of the site, this is Jim’s best explanation for what is found at the site. The Caldwells believe that the preparation for

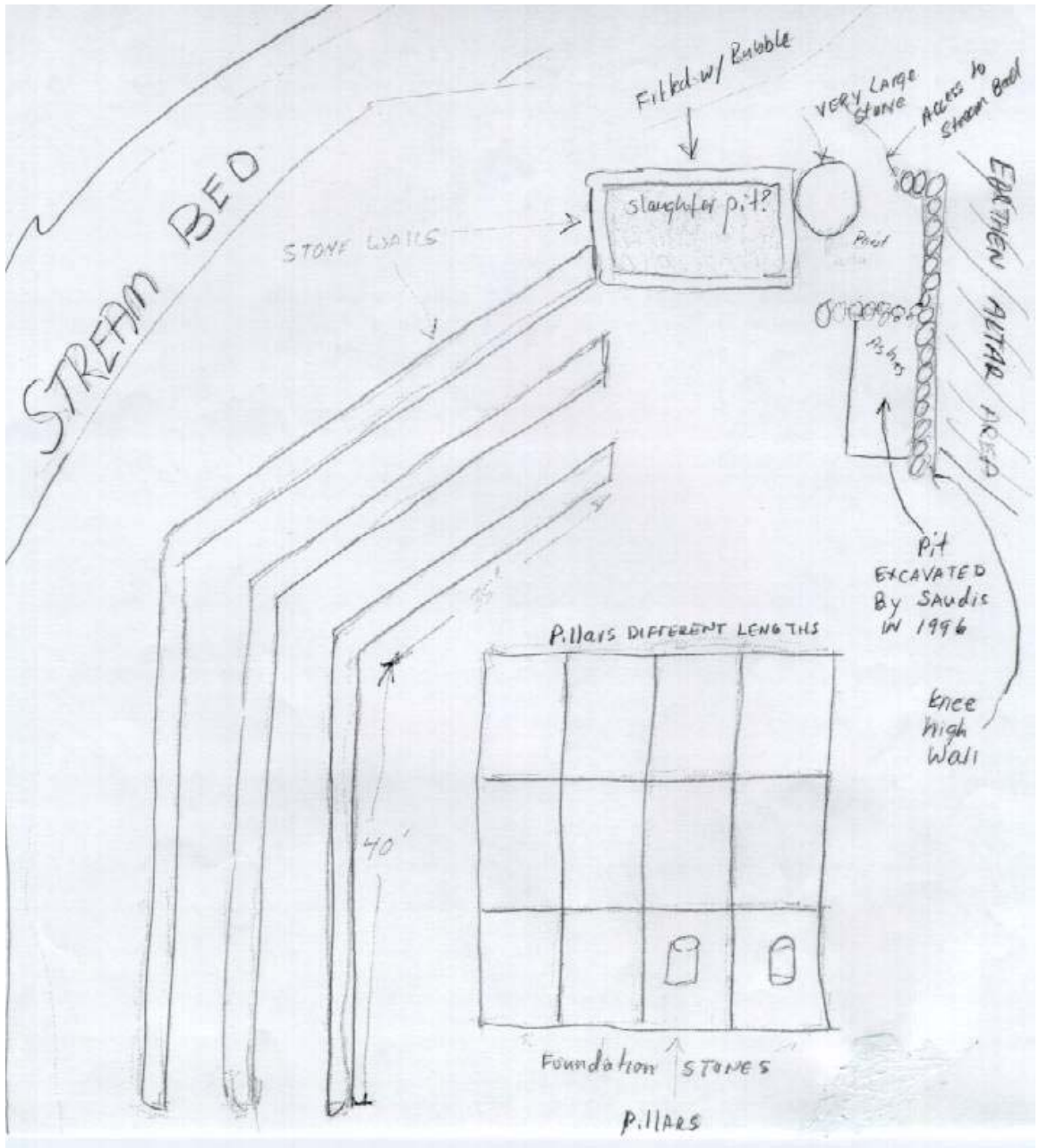


Fig. 42a. Drawing of Ancient Altar Site. Drawing by Jim Caldwell.

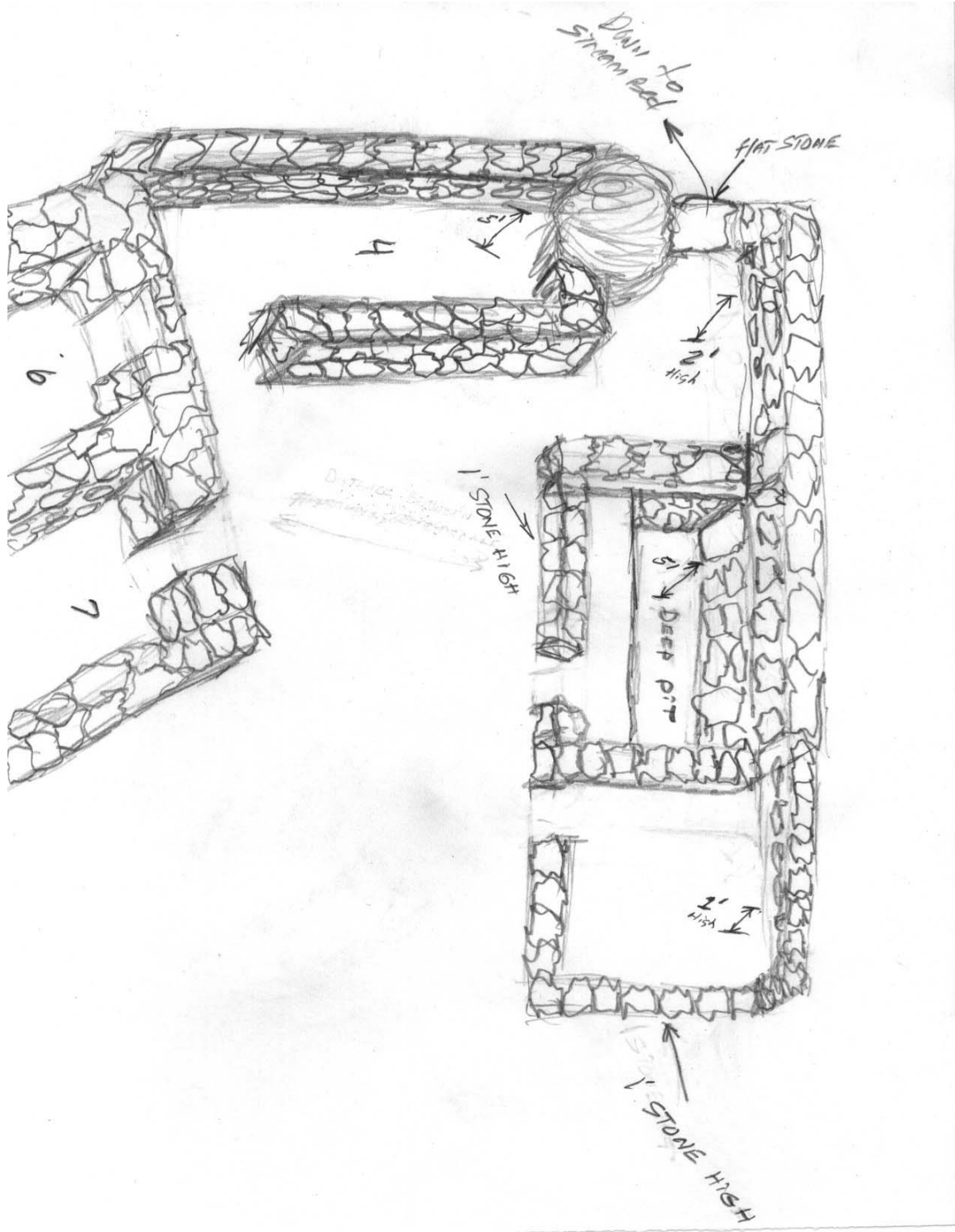


Fig. 42b. Drawing of Altar Site by Jim Caldwell. January 2003

these pillars had already been in progress by Moses, and the day the altar was constructed, these prepared marble pieces were put in place. They made the point that with Moses' upbringing in Egypt, and the countless shrines to lesser gods, he would do better than fieldstones for the true God. Moses knew this was a nation-building event and the beginning of a new covenant that deserved appropriate symbols for each tribe. In their travels to Masada and Egypt, while studying the construction of pillars, the Caldwells noticed more uniformity in the size of each piece that would make up the pillar. However, the pieces at the altar site are different lengths.

Therefore, Jim sees these pillars being set up in a square configuration, rather than a semi-circle configuration shown in Moller's work (Fig 43).³²⁴ He also feels that the pillars were different lengths to symbolize the varying sizes of the different tribes (Fig. 44). This configuration of stones in a square representing the twelve tribes is not without precedent. In Exodus 28:15-21, the breastplate of the high priest had costly stones placed in a square representing each of the twelve tribes, four rows with three stones on each.

The Caldwells reference Richard Burton [early explorer of Saudi Arabia] as he was speaking of a temple that is down south of al Bad in the middle of the desert, two miles in from the Red Sea. Burton was amazed that it was in the middle of nowhere. He said that the columns were so

³²⁴ The Caldwells, on their many visits to the *Holy Precinct* area, never saw these stones, or at least recognized them as being set up in any order. However, this photo is interesting, and deserves further consideration and investigation.



Fig. 43. Proposed Pillars in Semicircle. Moller, 260.

**AND MOSES SET UP 12 PILLARS
EACH REPRESENTING ONE OF THE TWELVE
TRIBES OF ISRAEL**

	NUMBERS	UNITS	INCHES		INCHES
MANASSEH	32200	1.00	14.00	MANASSEH	14
BENJAMIN	35400	1.10	15.39	BENJAMIN	15
EPHRAIM	40500	1.26	17.61	EPHRAIM	17
ASHER	41500	1.29	18.04	ASHER	18
GAD	45650	1.42	19.85	GAD	19
RUBEN	46500	1.44	20.22	RUBEN	20
NAPHTALI	53400	1.66	23.22	NAPHTALI	22
ISSACHAR	54400	1.69	23.65	ISSACHAR	24
ZEBULON	57400	1.78	24.96	ZEBULON	25
SIMEON	59300	1.84	25.78	SIMEON	26
DAN	62700	1.95	27.26	DAN	28
JUDAH	74600	2.32	32.43	JUDAH	32

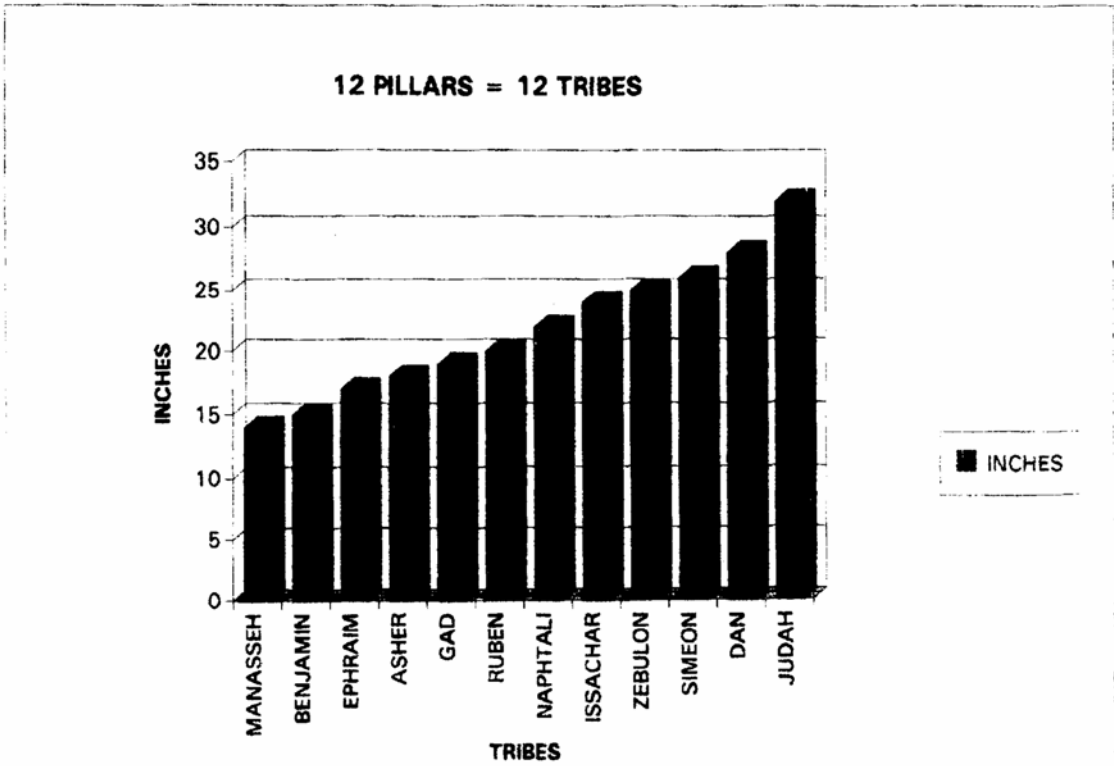


Fig. 44. Theory on the Varying Lengths of Pillar Stones According to Tribe.
Created by Jim Caldwell.

finely made that it was if they were turned by a machine. Burton believed the temple was made of alabaster, a marble-looking rock. Burton spoke of the temple having 12 columns, and that they were laid out in a square pattern, of which Burton said that it was *a typical Jewish layout*. Though Burton did not believe it was as ancient as Mosaic times, he associated the square layout with Jewish design.

The reason Jim Caldwell placed the “square of pillars” where he did in the diagram, is because there were several foundation stones in that area that looked like they were placed there originally. This is an important observation because Jim examined the site *before* the Saudi excavation.

In the photos of the area where all the pillars lay, it appears that there are a lot of chips of marble lying around, as if they were quarried right on the spot. But Jim found them to be granite fragments. This evidently was the conclusion of the Saudis as well, as they did not see this as a quarry site as either.

The possibility of this being Moses’ altar becomes more plausible as one considers the insights regarding the marble pieces, and also the following conclusions addressing the walled structure.

It will be helpful if the reader compares Figures 37 with 42a and 42b, as the findings of the Caldwells and the Saudi archaeologists are compared. For the purposes of this discussion, the Saudi diagram (Fig.

37), and its numbered rooms of the structure, will be used to make reference to different parts of the structure.

In sections 6 and 7, the Saudis believe that this “part of the building was a residential area and a storage as well.”³²⁵ Upon excavation of the floor of 6 and 7, the report says they dug down 4 ft from the base of the wall to reach what they call virgin soil. The report says they found “plenty of potsherds in various shapes and sizes and there was a layer of ash, charcoal, and bones mixed with other organic materials.”³²⁶ In another section of 6 and 7 the floor was found at around 3 ft and it also had some small potsherds, and a 15.75-inch layer of a mixture of soil, thick organic material, and animal waste. The Saudis explain the contents of this 75 ft corridor as a place for workers to stay and a storage spot from the Roman Nabataean era. Again, they say there is *no doubt* about this due to the dating of the pottery samples. Several things can be considered here. First, it was established earlier how dating certain artifacts is not an exact science.³²⁷ Second, the Caldwells, after combing the site for pottery before and after the excavation, never found a piece of pottery. However, upon hearing of some pottery found on the site, Jim Caldwell has no problem

³²⁵ Al-Ansary, 66.

³²⁶ Al-Ansary, 64-65.

³²⁷ It was noted earlier in the paper that scholars trying to date an ossuary that is likely from Jesus’ time is a challenge. One scholar, Kyle McCarter, said “that in the work they do (archaeology: i.e. dating) we are rarely absolutely certain about anything.” This is not the opinion of the Saudis regarding the dating of the pottery on the site. Also, in the January/February edition of *Archaeology* magazine, pp. 33-36, there is an article describing the ability of contemporary forgers to make “fake” artifacts that are suppose to date back to the second millennium B.C. Among the reasons for the success of the forgers, are the limits of *thermo luminescence dating*. Michel Brent, “Faking African Art,” *Archaeology* January-February. 2001: 32-38.

with the conclusion that the pottery is from the Nabatean Period. Penny Caldwell's observations here would be helpful:

It is, however, not at all accurate or scientific to assume and conclude that because Nabatean pottery was found on the surface in the area, that the original occupants or the builders of these structures were from the Nabatean Period. It is not at all uncommon to find layer upon layer of artifacts from different time periods within the perimeters of a single archaeological dig. Civilizations have always come in and used prior structures that have been vacated for either building materials to produce new structures, or simply remodel the existing buildings to suit their own needs. The evidence at Jebel al Maqla seems to point to this possibility with a much higher degree of probability than the claim that it is all from the Nabatean Period based upon a few potsherds found near the surface.³²⁸

The Saudis also say they found pottery fragments at lower levels of excavation in the quote above. The Caldwells were not able to analyze and confirm the pottery fragments found at the site, as they were not present for the dig. Judgment on this issue will have to be postponed until an additional source can confirm the Saudi findings.

Regarding the exposing of the various layers of soil in the structure, the lowest layers, which are likely the oldest, seem to hold the

³²⁸ Caldwell, Analysis of Saudi Archeological Surveys Conducted at Jebel al Lawz.

organic material and animal wastes. This could support the theory that these corridors were actually a corral or “cattle shoots” to direct bulls to the slaughter platform in Moses’ time. Plenty of animal wastes would be likely in these corridors. Also, the shape of section 6 and 7 seems quite unusual for a dwelling. Why the sharp angle in the middle of the corridor? There is also no sign of a roof or walls in the corridor to make separate rooms. Some might make the argument that the workers could line up to sleep without separate rooms. Others might think there should have been a separate room for storage. What of the thick organic material and animal wastes? Did they have the pack animals in the same quarters with them? Did they dump organic waste in their living quarters? Or, are these wastes from ancient passing Bedouins? The Caldwells made this statement:

While a portion of the report [The Saudi site-survey in question] does allow for the fact that animals were penned in here, it is hard to believe that the marble miners lived inside the corral with them. Beside this, there is a great deal of ash spoken of in this report inside a portion of the stone structures. It is difficult to find it reasonable that the miners would both live in the stables and build campfires inside their dwellings. While it is not at all unusual for cooking fires to be placed inside an ancient dwelling, the size and nature of these structures would not have been conducive to such activities. Having examined the ash layers in one part

of the structure in particular, it is glaringly obvious that the entire room was an ash pit at some point in time. There would have not been room for an individual to have bedded down here at all.³²⁹

The Caldwells also made the observation that they have been all through Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, and Israel, in many archaeological digs and places where there are ancient ruins of homes and dwellings. Even in Saudi Arabia, crisscrossing the country in their truck for 12 years, they had never seen a dwelling from any time period that looked like this. Dr Glen Fritz had similar conclusions from his trips all over the world and all his research. It can also be seen that there is not much evidence that these walls supported roofs, which obviously would be helpful for a residence. There is some discrepancy between the observations of the Saudis and the Caldwells regarding the height of some of the walls, their shape, and placement of openings. This will be addressed below.

Another concern that Dr.Glen Fritz expressed was that the bones found on the site should have been C-14 dated. This is standard procedure in this type of dig. An analysis of the ashes found would also be helpful information.

If one compares the rooms or “work areas” on the diagrams with each other, rooms 2 and 3 parallel Jim Caldwell’s location for an ash pit for ashes from burnt offerings (Figs. 37, 42a and 42b). One would expect layers of ash in this area if indeed Jim’s hypothesis were correct. In part of

³²⁹ Ibid.

that area, the Saudi's report said that they dug down 3.28 feet and found the floor consisted of well-beaten compact soil. Only some minute potsherds and *ashes were found*.³³⁰ There was also ash found in other places on the site. Jim Caldwell, as he was investigating area 2, found excessive ash which he feels may have been the ash pit for the burnt offerings:

At the access to the earthen altar (Fig 42a & 42b) which is right at the foot of the mountain itself, there is a large stone [also on the Saudi diagram] and a cleared area that after excavation had a lot of very black powder as if it were ash mixed in. A pit to the right of the "access to the earthen altar area," the Saudis had probably cut down way past the virgin earth to see how deep the layers of ash went down into the earth, and when they got down near the bottom, it was very obvious there was a lot of the ashen material down there.³³¹

As seen in Figure 42b, Jim felt the ash pit went down a few more feet from the top of the wall than the Saudis calculated.

A further description of what Jim envisioned for the site is helpful:

It seemed to me that it was a place where large oxen were being brought in for sacrifice, into two chutes, a bull pen, where they were cut, the blood being let. To get the bull to

³³⁰ Al-Ansary, 64.

³³¹ Jim Caldwell, interview, August, 2002.

cooperate, they are pushed into the shoot, and before they get to ‘the squeeze,’ they had turned at the angle so before then couldn’t see what was happening in front of them. So you got them up to a point and turned the corner and then got them into the squeeze where you could pin them down to cut their throats. Once they would smell blood they would tend to ‘bolt.’ This provided a way to control them. If they backed up once they turned the corner, they would back into the wall.³³²

This would perhaps explain the thickness of the wall.

There are some variations between the two drawings of the structure. The photo of the structure by Jim Caldwell (Fig. 36) seems to show the absence of end walls on the east end of the corridors as shown in the Saudi diagram. The Saudi’s may be basing this on a footing that is present. The purpose of the other openings between the two corridors as seen in the Saudi diagram, if indeed they were meant to be doors, may be to remove a bull from the corral if need be. The Saudis, of course, explained these as doors for the workers. A lengthy quote here by the Caldwells regarding these discrepancies is helpful:

[...] There are inaccuracies in several statements regarding stone placements and door placements. When referring to the report and plate No. 5, [Fig. 37] rooms 2 and 3 have been incorrectly represented. On the southern exposures of

³³² Ibid.

each of these rooms, doorways and walls have been drawn into the figure that seem to be consistent with the size and height of the adjacent structures. Jim examined these two rooms extensively both prior to and after the Saudi excavations. He found that in reality, room 3 is quite ill defined and remains mostly buried. Only a single layer of the rock wall is visible, and its size is not accurately compared to room 2. With regard to room 2, it has been drawn in the basic shape of a square, and about the size of room 3. This too is incorrect. The actual shape of room 2 is much closer to that of a rectangle [Figs. 42a & 42b], and its southern wall is also only comprised of a single layer of visible stone. Room 2 is also unique with regard to the level of the floor. It is much deeper than all the other rooms, and it is here that the ash layers can be so clearly seen. In the examination of plate 5 [Fig. 37], rooms 6 and 7 have inaccuracies as well. The plate shows a representation of numerous doorway openings on the inside wall which are not there at all. The central wall is completely intact and unbroken by doorways. The southern end is represented with only one doorway when in fact there are two. The doorway represented at the opposite end connecting room 7 to room 5 has been accurately portrayed. A question arises

as to the time frame in which the wall separating rooms 6 and 4 was erected. It appears that from room 6, the opening still visible [Fig. 42b], but later filled in with debris from the inside of room 4. This would lead to the conclusion that there was a doorway between rooms 6 and 4 in the original structure.³³³

This would support the idea of chutes guiding the animals into the sacrifice area.

It seems reasonable that with multiple burnt offerings that the ash pit would fill up and the overflow ash may have been thrown about various areas of the structure. Some may have been thrown in the chute or corridors to off set the effects of animal wastes. Also, to explain some of the different locations of ash remains, it may be that in later centuries Bedouins may have made campfires behind the roofless walls for some protection against the elements. The report shows the ash above the organic material found in their “cross-section of Section 6, 7 of Western Wall.”³³⁴ Since there is not an analysis of the ash remains, one can only speculate on their content.

With the various opinions presented and weighed, it seems the evidence for an ancient altar site at this location is a legitimate theory. For the Saudis, who have *no doubt* what it is, one should take caution. Though the evidence seems very strong in favor of this being a corral or chute for

³³³ Caldwell, Analysis of Saudi Archeological Surveys Conducted at Jebel el Lawz, January 2003.

³³⁴ Al –Ansary, plate 7.

animals being lead to an altar site, even the very one mentioned in Exodus 24:4, there needs to be more information released from the site to become even more certain. To say it is the altar site of Moses without a doubt, is to draw the same criticism rendered by this author toward the Saudi's conclusions. However, after considering the whole body of evidence presented in this entire thesis in favor of this being the actual site of the Mt. Sinai/Horeb, one has to seriously consider this site as the best possible candidate for the Biblical mountain of God.

VI. Arguments Concerning the Route of the Exodus and the Wilderness Wanderings

A. The Route from Egypt to The Crossing of the Red Sea

Any discussion of the location of Mt. Sinai would have to include a treatment of the route Israel traveled. This is important to ensure the location of the Holy Mountain agreed with the Biblical record and basic reasoning regarding the distances and any archeological evidences that might shed some light on whether a particular place might fit the narrative and accommodate nearly two million Hebrews. For instance if one believed that Mt. Sinai is in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula, as the traditional site is, then one might question that location on the basis that there were several Egyptian turquoise mines at Wadi Maghara, Serabit el-Khadim and Wadi e-Nasb. According to Menashe Har-El this would have required a standing Egyptian army in the area to protect their interests.³³⁵ From the Scripture we know that Israel was fleeing from Pharaoh. Thus, for such a large group to set up camp in the near vicinity of an Egyptian army post would not be the better part of wisdom. If however, the Scripture gave

³³⁵ Menashe Har-El, The Sinai Journeys. (San Diego: Ridgefield Publishing Company, 1983) 224-225.

clear evidence that Mt. Sinai was in the south of Sinai, and if one could positively identify some ancient place-names to support this thesis, then, the presence of Egyptian soldiers in the near vicinity would have to be accepted or the archaeological information reexamined. However, there are very few locations mentioned in the Biblical record on the route of the Exodus that we can identify today with a high degree of confidence.³³⁶ Yet, there are enough places that we can identify either by the detailed description given in the Biblical text or archaeological evidence, to give the diligent student of Bible geography some key reference points for the direction of the Exodus, the crossing point of the Red Sea, and the general direction of most of the forty years of wandering by the Jews.

This treatment of the Exodus will serve the purpose of establishing the feasibility of Jabal al Lawz as the location of the Biblical Mt. Sinai. There has been more written on this subject than is necessary to include here to properly support the thesis. Therefore, closely following the Biblical text, the Exodus route will be traced from Raamses to the Red Sea crossing point, the Red Sea to Sinai, from Sinai to Kadesh and from Kadesh to the crossing of the Jordan River into Canaan. Then the Jabal al Lawz location will be discussed in relation to the distance to the most likely location of Kadesh, given in Deuteronomy 1:2. Opposing views will be mentioned as the route is traced, but the burden of this section is to give evidence, in light of the Biblical text, through the knowledge of

³³⁶ Har-el, 232. According to Har-El, a considerable proportion of the names of these camps were coined by the Jews themselves during the course of their wanderings, and for their own purposes. Most of the names were given to various objects on the landscape and were even placed to commemorate certain events that took place along the way. Much of their route was devoid of towns/habitations, so there were no local inhabitants to carry on use of the name. Most of the names are outside the borders of their future Promised Land, so it is understandable that they would not keep these places in their geographical listings.

distances and geography, and the findings of archaeology, that Jebel el Lawz could indeed have been the destination of ancient Israel on the journey from Egypt.

The Biblical record explains, in Exodus 12:37, that after the last plague Israel gathered up their belongings and left Rameses. It is also recorded, in Numbers 33:2-5, that:

Moses recorded their starting places according to their journeys by the command of the Lord, and these are their journeys according to their starting places. And they journeyed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month, on the next day after the Passover the sons of Israel started out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians, while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn whom the Lord had struck down among them [...] Then the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses and camped in Succoth.

There have been several different sites proposed for Rameses: Pelusium, Tanis, Tel er-Retabeh, and Qantir. Most scholars would identify either Tanis or Qantir as the Biblical Rameses (Fig. 45).³³⁷ Qantir would seem more practical because the location given for Succoth, the first campsite is only seven miles from Qantir according to Har-El. However, even though Tanis is another 25 miles north of Qantir (making the trip to Succoth around 32 miles), due to the circumstances surrounding the first day of the Exodus, the mass of fleeing Hebrews could have made the trek. Later in this section the distance of a “day’s journey” will be discussed. The fact that Israel left in haste, traveled by “day and night” (Ex.

³³⁷ Har-el, 262-263.

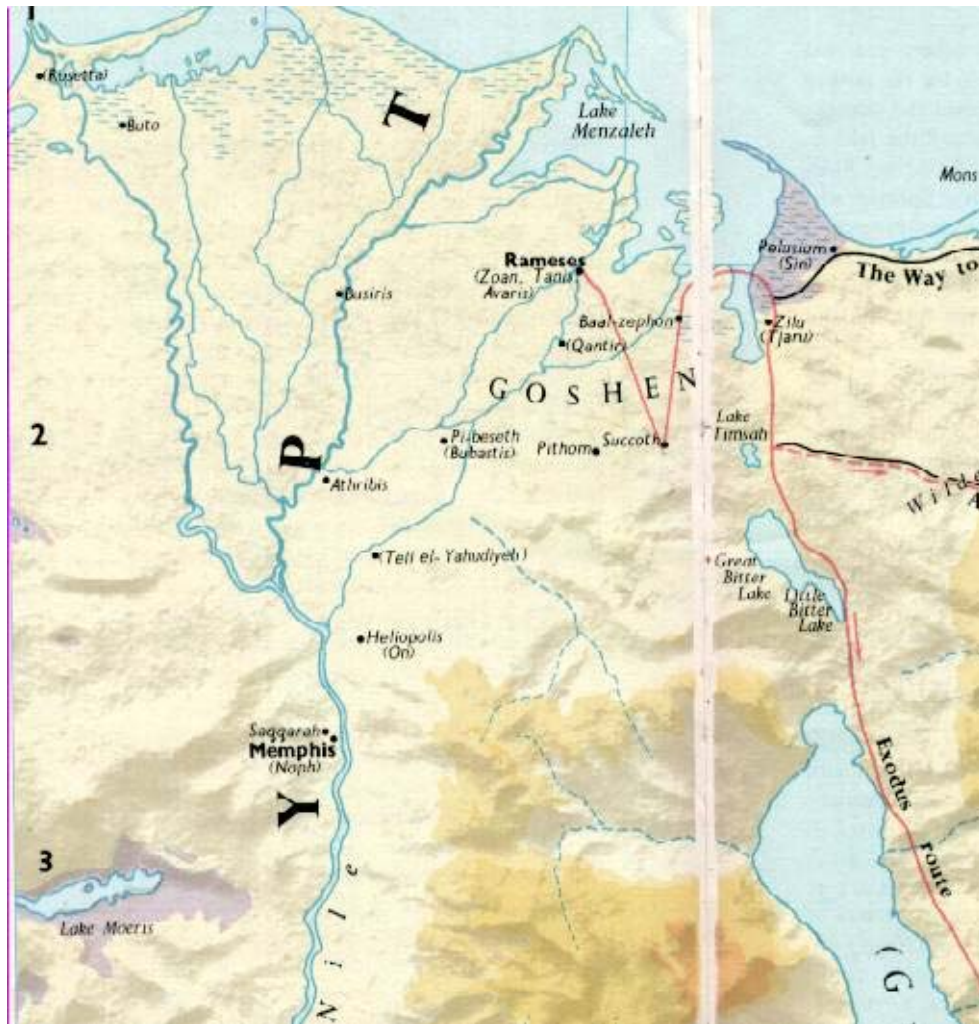


Fig. 45. Locations for Rameses. *Oxford Bible Atlas*. 58-59.

13:21-22), and “went up in *martial array*,”³³⁸ could make that distance conceivable.

The location of the first campsite would of course set the direction of the Exodus route. Succoth is believed to be in the region of Theku, west of Lake Timsah, which is southwest of both Tanis and Qantir.³³⁹ As Israel is moving toward the Red Sea crossing point, this would begin to eliminate northern Suez crossing points like Lake Menzala, or Menzaleh. There are other reasons that the Menzaleh crossing point may not be the best choice, but again the purpose of this section is to establish a route that is feasible, with the evidence available, with Jabal al Lawz as the destination. There is endless arguing of points and counterpoints on routes and crossing points. This section will establish a route based upon all the evidence available. It may not exclude other routes from the possibility of an Arabian destination, but will attempt to demonstrate that the route proposed is in closest compliance with what is known about various sites and locations today, as well as what the Biblical record reveals.

Before the next campsite is mentioned, it might be beneficial to discuss major caravan/trade routes that Israel may have taken advantage of in their movements. In Exodus 13:17-18, Moses summarizes for the reader the plan of God in His upcoming general movements of the Children of Israel. Notice these two verses: “Now it came about when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did

³³⁸ Martial Array means “military formation,” i.e. side-by-side blocks rather than a long stretched-out train. In this organized fashion Israel could move much more efficiently with the Lord out ahead of them for all to see.

³³⁹ Once again pinpointing Succoth has been very difficult. “The various attempts to associate ancient city remains with this Biblical town have never led to any convincing conclusions.” Anati, p. 184. The placing of this camp near Timsah may be based partially on the assumed rate of travel of the Hebrews. At 20-30 miles a day, and a southeastern direction would put Succoth somewhere in this general area.

not lead them by the *Way of the Philistines*, even though it was near; for God said, ‘Lest the people change their minds when they see war, and they return to Egypt.’ Hence God led the people around by the *way of the wilderness to the Red Sea*.³⁴⁰ Later in verse twenty Moses picks up again the camp-by-camp account of the journey. It seems verses 17 and 18 are a strategy interlude to inform the reader of the overall route that God was going to use to lead His people to Canaan. It would not be along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, rather a mid-Sinai route that is most likely what pilgrims and travelers have been calling the Way of the Wilderness or the Darb El Haj (way of the pilgrim) for centuries. Upon perusal of Har-El’s map (Fig. 46), one can see several major trade routes/roads across the northern Sinai Peninsula.³⁴⁰

The road referred to in Exodus 13:17 was the northern most major road that followed the Mediterranean Sea shore and went through El Arish and into Gaza. God did not choose this road, as they would have encountered Philistine opposition. It was the closest route for getting out of Egypt, but it was the longest route to Mt. Sinai. A second route, that starts along the same road as the Way of the Philistines, goes northeast at Romani (Fig. 46) and goes across the narrow sandbank of Lake Bardawil, and reenters the Way of the Philistines at El Arish. This route is incorrect for the same reason as for the Way of the Philistines, plus it does not take them into the Wilderness of Shur (Ex. 15:22), and the sand bar is much too narrow for the amount and activities of all the Jews, plus it is a completely barren place for hungry flocks.

³⁴⁰ For the discussion of trade routes or ancient roads, Har-El’s work quoted above is the best treatment found. Therefore, most of the information on these routes will be sourced from his very thorough work on the subject, pp. 263-270.

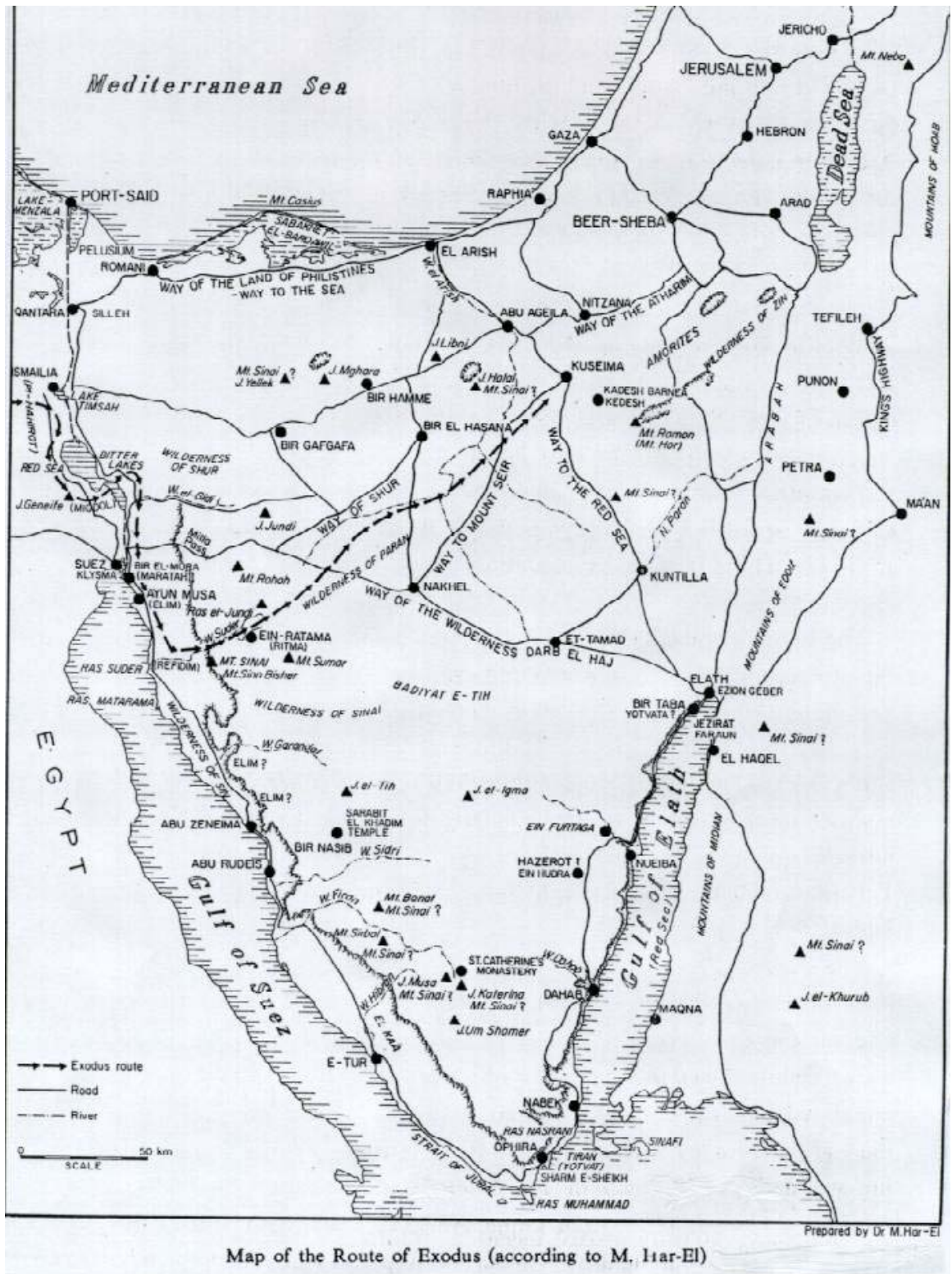


Fig. 46. Har-El's Map. Menashe Har-El, *The Sinai Journeys*. (San Diego: Ridgefield Publishing Co., 1983)

A third route leading eastward from Lake Timsah is the Way of Shur. It is very ancient, and was used for caravans coming from the center of Palestine to Egypt. Har-El is very confident this was the road followed by Abraham and Jacob.

A fourth route is the shortest route to Midian, and thus to Jabal al Lawz. This is likely the “Way of the Wilderness of the Red Sea” (Exodus 13:8). This route is described by Emmanuel Anati: “it corresponds to the route that for the past 1,300 years has gone by the name of “Darb el Haj,” or “Way of the Pilgrim.” It crosses Mitla or Jiddi pass and turns southward, passes by the foot of Jebel el-Gharra at Qalat en-Nakhl, and then crosses the impervious, torrid highlands of et-Tih up to Tamad; from there it descends to the Gulf of Aqaba, leading pilgrims from all parts of northern Africa to Mecca.”³⁴¹ Musil also refers to this route in his book: “The quickest and most convenient way for them [Israel] to get away from the sphere of Egyptian authority was upon the transport route leading from Egypt to the northern extremity of the Gulf of Aqaba.”³⁴²

Har-el mentions another route that leads to the copper and turquoise mines in the southern Sinai. It passes from the Delta region through Suez to the western shore of the Sinai Peninsula and then follows the coast down to the traditional site. Har-El dismisses this route because it also did not pass through the Wilderness of Shur and the Israelites would have done whatever they could to avoid it, due to the presence of Egyptian garrisons.

³⁴¹ Emmanuel Anati, The Mountain of God. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1986) 184.

³⁴² Musil, 268.

Therefore, the most logical route to Midian would be the Darb el Haj, which in Moses' time was evidently called the Way of the Wilderness of the Red Sea. With this in mind, the camp-by-camp route examination can continue.

Heading southwest from Succoth, which would be west of Lake Timsah [which is in the Suez Canal system], the Scripture says in both Exodus 13:20 and Numbers 33:6, that they “camped in Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness.” What wilderness? Anati believes that the terms “they left,” and “encamped at,” occurring over and over indicate that the Hebrews had only gone a day's march. A strong march from the possible site of Succoth could have brought them to the border of Egypt below the Bitter Lakes (Fig. 47). This distance could have been as much as 45 miles, which indeed would be taxing, but as noted above, there is urgency and boldness among the people, and there is night and day traveling.³⁴³ The wilderness is a major factor in determining which Red Sea was crossed, the Gulf of Aqaba or Suez. With *Etham* on the edge of the wilderness in Exodus 13:20, and later after the Red Sea crossing they went into the wilderness of *Etham* (Numbers 33:7-8), juxtapose these two sites. Then, Exodus 15:22 tells us that another name for the wilderness that Israel came into after the crossing was the Wilderness of Shur. So where is the wilderness of Shur? Exodus 15:22, Genesis 25:18, I Samuel 15:7 and 27:8 tell the reader clearly that

³⁴³ The rate of “a day's journey will be discussed later on. There are accounts of armies such as Moshe Dyan's army in the Six-Day War marching from Nuweiba on the Gulf of Aqaba to the Suez Canal in six days while camping at night. That could be as much as 250 miles and a rate of over 40 miles per day. Also, G.I Davies wrote: The speed of an *army* on the march, especially a long one, tended to be rather slower than the average.” Graham Davies, “The Significance of Deuteronomy 1:2 for the Location of Mount Horeb,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 111.87-101 (1979): 96. It is also important to note that the distances between Rameses, Succoth, and Etham, is conjecture at this point. Rameses has the best evidence for its location, though some would still debate that. If Tanis is the correct location, Israel did have a significant distance to cover in a few number of days, however, they had a mind to travel, and travel with efficiency, with God's help day and night, and they were all excited about their new venture of freedom.

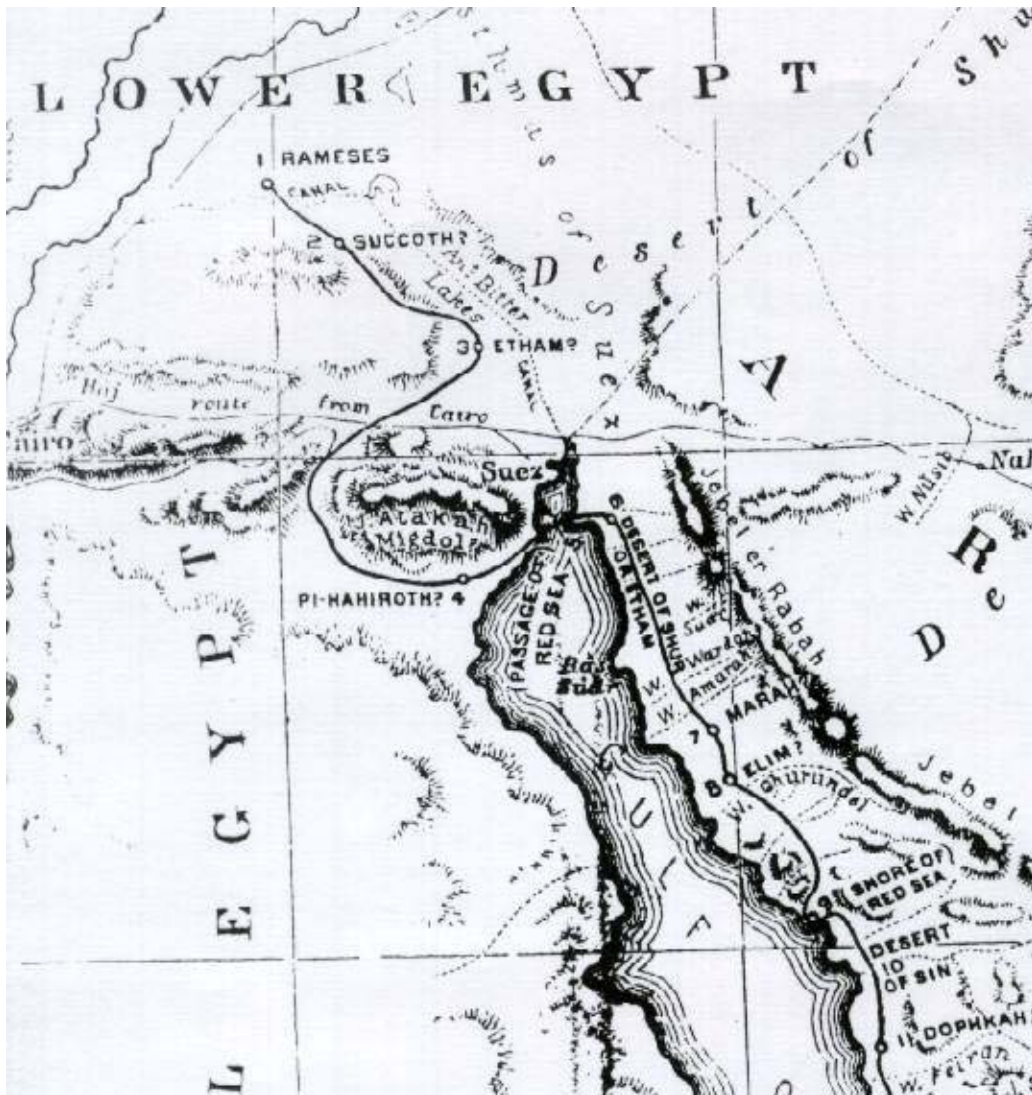


Fig. 47. Palmer's Map. E.H. Palmer, Desert of the Exodus. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872)

Shur, the Wilderness of Shur is *east* of Egypt, as well as near its border. This makes very difficult the theory that Israel passed over the Gulf of Aqaba, because the location of the Wilderness of Shur, in Scripture, is more precisely revealed than that of Paran, Sin, and Zin. With this in mind, one must find a crossing point through the Suez arm of the Red Sea.

The second camp at Etham, in the wilderness, was about a day's journey from where they turned back and camped before the sea. This is evident because when they passed through the Red Sea, they went into the Wilderness of Shur/Etham, which is near Egypt. The text says in Exodus 14:2-3 that Israel was "to turn back [go back in the direction they came] and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea." So where does that place the crossing point, at the tip of the Gulf of Suez or in the more popular site, the Bitter Lakes? Understandably, the trip from Rameses to the Bitter Lakes would have been much shorter, but does that body of water best fit the Biblical record? These questions will now be addressed.

Most searches for the crossing point of the Red Sea have centered on five different places on the eastern border of Egypt. Three of these sites are inland lakes: Menzaleh to the far north; Lake Timsah, farther south along the canal system about ten miles north of the Great Bitter Lake; the Bitter Lakes, a dry lake bed in the same system, and the fifth option was various places on the Gulf of Suez.

The Bitter Lakes option has been aided by the Hebrew meaning of the term "Red Sea." The Hebrew term is "*Yam Suph*." "*Yam*" for "sea," and "*Suph*"

for “reeds.” Therefore, many scholars think that since there are no reeds or swampy vegetation in either the Gulf of Suez or Aqaba, then they must have crossed at one of these lakes.

This argument breaks down when the term *Yam Suph* is used for the Gulf of Aqaba in I Kings 9:26: “King Solomon also built a fleet of ships in Ezion-geber, which is near Eloth on the shore of the Red Sea [*Yam Suph*], in the land of Edom.” The Gulf of Aqaba has no reeds in it, so the term *yam suph* does not mandate reeds.³⁴⁴ Also, one scholar notes that the word “*suph*,” was used in Jonah 2:5 to refer to a plant that should rightfully be translated “seaweed or weed.”³⁴⁵ Obviously *suph* is broad enough to include deep-water plants that large marine animals would consume. Some scholars have also leaned toward the shallow lakes because there are some *natural* explanations for the dividing of the sea. Dr. Knuteson documents two of these opinions in his article: “the reedy waters of the Bitter Lakes and Lake Mensaleh can be affected by the strong east winds precisely in the way described in Ex. xiv. 21 and [were] experienced on a small scale by Aly Shafei Bey in 1945-6 [...]”³⁴⁶ Dr. Knuteson makes another convincing argument about *Yam Suph* needing to be large enough to receive the immense swarm of locusts that covered Egypt that God blew into the sea (Exodus 10:19).³⁴⁷

³⁴⁴ Har-El, 192. Har-El made this statement: “The Red Sea could not have been at the Gulf of Suez because reeds have never grown there,” is an example of this reasoning.

³⁴⁵ Roy Knuteson, Crossing the “Red Sea.” unpublished article, 2000, 3.

³⁴⁶ Knuteson, 2. Dr. Knuteson sites The New Bible Dictionary, J.D. Douglas, organizing editor. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974) 1078, the other example is International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. IV. James Orr. General Editor. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), “Red Sea,” 2540

³⁴⁷ Knuteson, 4ff. Dr. Knuteson feels that this huge swarm could have only been accommodated by the Gulf of Suez.

The northern Gulf of Suez leaves the only option. To comply more with the Biblical account, the body of water, which the Hebrews crossed, needed to have more depth, yet not too great a depth; yet the distance to cross it in one night had to be reasonable. Note the description of the event in Exodus 15:5 and 10: “The deeps cover them; they went down into the depths like a stone. Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them, and they sank like lead in the mighty waters.” The terminology for these events denotes more than a shallow lake between three and twenty feet. Both verses seem to intimate that once the waters covered them there was room for them to sink to the bottom. This kind of scenario is doubtful unless the walls of water on each side are at least fifty feet in height. Yet, surfers have survived the weight of some very high waves. These strong armored soldiers could only have drowned if the initial crash of the waves either knocked them unconscious so they were unable to swim to safety or they were dazed and too far under the surface to make it to the top. Is there this kind of depth on the Suez side of the Red Sea?

Josephus gives another insight into the crossing point. “They [Egyptian army] also seized on the passages by which they imagined the Hebrews might fly, shutting them up between inaccessible precipices and the sea, for there was on each side a ridge of mountains that terminated at the sea, which were impassable by reason of their roughness, and obstructed their flight.”³⁴⁸ Advocates for the Gulf of Aqaba crossing have at least two spots chosen that fit this description of mountains closing in as this is more prevalent in the topography of the Gulf of Aqaba. Yet there are some possible routes from the shores of the Gulf of Suez.

³⁴⁸ Josephus, 62.

William Whiston, translator for the volume on The Complete Works of Josephus, makes the follow comments in the footnotes under Josephus’

description of the crossing site. Whiston is quoting a writer named Reland:

A traveler whose name was Eneman, when he returned out of Egypt, told me the he went the same way from Egypt to Mount Sinai, which he supposed the Israelites of old traveled; and that he found several mountainous tracks that ran down toward the Red Sea. He thought the Israelites had proceeded as far as the desert of Etham, (Exodus Xiii.20,) when they were commanded by God to return back, (Exodus xiv. 2,) and to pitch their camp between Migdol and the sea; and that when they were not able to fly, unless by the sea, they were shut in on each side by mountains. He [Eneman] also thought we [the readers] might evidently learn hence, how it might be said that the Israelites were in Etham before they went over the sea, and yet might be said to have come into Etham after they had passed over the sea also.”³⁴⁹

Reland then quotes the man as being *near Suez*. This Red Sea must refer to the

Gulf of Suez, as there is nothing of his description further up the Suez system.

Also Whiston must have understood Josephus to be referring to the Gulf of Suez.

E.H. Palmer, in his book, The Desert of the Exodus, explains his view of the crossing point of the Gulf of Suez.³⁵⁰ The team led by Palmer was the first

³⁴⁹ Josephus, 62-63.

³⁵⁰ E. H Palmer, The Desert of the Exodus, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872) 41-43. Others that hold to this crossing area are E. Robinson, A. Smith, Keil and Delitzsch, James Murphy, John Rea, J. McQuitty, and Gordon Franz.

expedition to Sinai made up of professional military personnel, and scientists. It was conducted in 1870. It was also the first expedition to undertake extensive mapping and photography of the area. The investigation explored the entire Sinai Peninsula. Notice the following quotation from Palmer: “Two hours ride from Suez brought us to ‘Ayun Musa, or Moses’ Wells, a beautiful little oasis in the desert... To the north stretches a vast level plain of sand, with a long chain of mountains bordering it on the east; and on the northwest the *bold promontory of the Ras Atakah overhangs the Gulf*”(Fig. 48).³⁵¹ Palmer’s map may not agree with some later maps on the location of such sites like Rameses, but it does give a good summary of the overall direction of Israel’s escape from Egypt proper, as proposed by this author. Notice further description from Palmer: “ Here tradition places the site of the passage of the Red Sea; and certain it is that, at least within the range over which the eye can wander, the waters must have closed in upon Pharaoh’s struggling hosts.”³⁵²

If one studies a map of present-day Egypt, in the northern Gulf of Suez there is a Peninsula (Ra’s Adabyah) that projects into the Gulf across from Ayun Musa that would make the crossing distance about 6-7 miles in map miles. A similar distance across can be calculated from the base of the peninsula across to Ra’s Misallah. The former crossing site is basically synonymous with Palmer’s site. The depth of the Gulf of Suez does not exceed 80meters or around 262

³⁵¹ Ibid. As mentioned above, in Josephus’ description of the event, there wasn’t just “wilderness” closing Israel in, but mountain peaks hindering their escape from Pharaoh. On Palmer’s map and on most others the Atakah range can be seen closing in this area and would be adequate to satisfy Josephus’ requirements.

³⁵² Ibid.

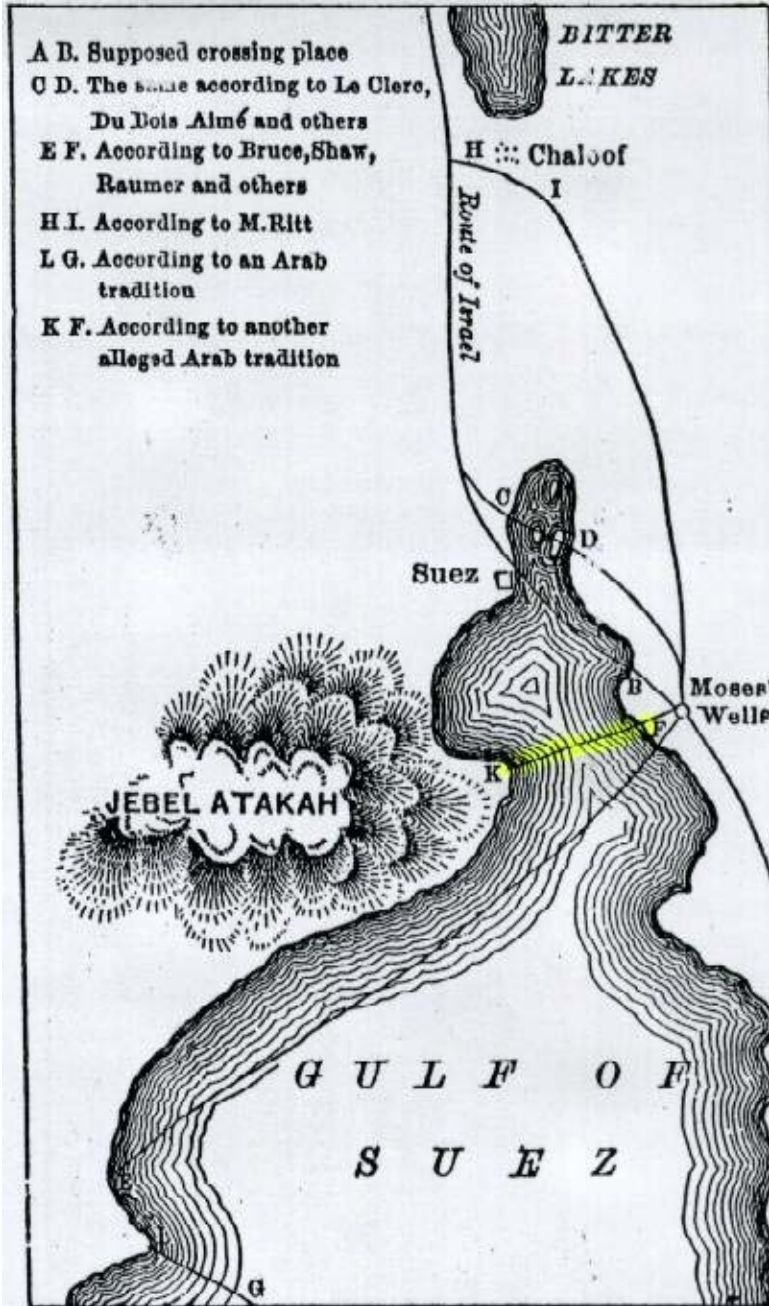


Fig. 48. Palmer's Crossing Point. Har-El, *The Sinai Journeys* 146. Yellow highlighted line near where Palmer proposed the crossing site.

feet.³⁵³ One source placed the depth in some places near 700 feet.³⁵⁴ The exact depth in this area is not known, but it is likely more in line with the depths needed to comply with the Biblical account.³⁵⁵ Also, upon reaching the eastern banks, they would have moved into the lower portion of the deserts of Shur/Etham.³⁵⁶ Palmer's map indicates that the Israelites by passed Jebel 'Athaqa, which is regarded as the site of Migdol, from the west and south, and thus reached the Gulf of Suez. The distance across, if it is around seven miles, could be transversed in around three and one half hours at a very modest walking rate of two miles per hour, this would not make for too long a night.

Pi-hahiroth, according to Anati means "mouth of the canal" which fits his theory that the children of Israel crossed at Lake Sirbonus on the Mediterranean.

According to the concordance definition, "mouth of the gorges" is more accurate,

³⁵³ Har-el, 97.

³⁵⁴ Statistics given on a website on Egypt, with updated information.

³⁵⁵ Gordon Franz says the land bridge in this area is an average of 20 feet deep and four miles across the Gulf of Suez. Obviously with shipping today this "land bridge" would need to be at least the depth of the Suez Canal most of the way across the Gulf at that point. The draft of a ship must not exceed 53 feet in the canal. Encarta 96 Encyclopedia It is significant that Palmer makes the following statement: "there is abundant evidence that the northern end of the Gulf of Suez has been gradually silted up" p. 43. Palmer's book was printed in 1872, so this could imply that our present day calculations of the depth of this possible crossing site, may not be in line with the depths from over a hundred years ago, but more significantly from Moses' day. Actually the depths in Moses day could have been much, much deeper. It is not necessary to demand a crossing at this land bridge. Another staging point in this general area of the northern Gulf of Suez, that would still land the Jews on the shores in the wilderness of Shur/Etham, is possible, as noted above in the text.

³⁵⁶ Notice Palmer's comments regarding the "landing point" of Israel's crossing at 'Ayun Musa: "there can be little doubt that at this point, 'Ayun Musa, we are on the right track of the Israelites at the commencement of their journey. 'So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; and they went into the wilderness of Shur" (Ex. 15:22) The word Shur in Hebrew signifies 'a wall;' and as we stand at Ayun Musa, and glance over the desert at the Jebels er Rahah [See Palmers map in Fig. 48] and et Tih which border the gleaming plain, we at once appreciate the fact that these long wall-like escarpments are the chief, if not the only, prominent characteristics of this portion of the wilderness, and we need not wonder that the Israelites should have named this memorable spot after its most salient feature, the wilderness of Shur, or the wall." Palmer, p. 44. Though Palmer shows this range going further south, the wilderness of Shur Etham likely goes much farther north, which would be more in line with the Biblical accounts.

which would fit the northern Gulf of Suez location and not demand an ancient man-made canal.³⁵⁷

Har-El criticizes Palmer's view by saying it was too far for Israel to travel down to the Suez to cross from Rameses. Earlier it was demonstrated that this distance is not extreme. He also asks the question of why the Bible does not mention the palm trees and water sources at 'Ayun Musa? The crossing could have been completed up or down the coast on the sandy banks of the sea, and not exactly at Ayun Musa. Har-El places the crossing at the lower half of the Bitter Lakes. One of Anati's criticisms of this view is stated as follows: "if the Hebrews had ventured by that route across the lakes by virtue of the parting waters, the Egyptian army would not have hesitated to follow the coast and wait for them on the other side"³⁵⁸

Another objection to the Suez crossing theory, by those who prefer the Gulf of Aqaba crossing points, is Israel was "out of Egypt" before they crossed the Red Sea. This argument is based largely on Exodus 14:11 and Joshua 2:10 and 24:6. "Then they said to Moses, [at the shore of the Red Sea] 'is it because there were no graves *in Egypt* that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you deal with us this way, *bringing us out of Egypt*. Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die *in the wilderness* (Exodus 14:11)." "For we have heard how Jehovah dried up the water of the Red Sea before you, *as you were coming out of Egypt*" (Joshua 2:

³⁵⁷ James Strong, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers), p. 94 of Hebrew glossary.

³⁵⁸ Anati, 187.

10). “And I brought your fathers out of Egypt, *and you came to the sea* [...]”
(Joshua 24:6).

It is true that the generally recognized border of Egypt proper is along the line of the Suez Canal perhaps out to the “wall of Shur”. This was established earlier in this thesis. It can also be established that the Sinai was not strictly Egypt proper, but rather a protectorate. It seems in Exodus 14: 11, the people were not concerned about what border they crossed as much as the fact that they had left their home in Goshen, which was Egypt to them, not this barren wilderness beyond the population centers of Egypt that they knew as Egypt. Their words should not be scrutinized as to whether they knew exactly where they were geographically, all they knew is that they had left what they knew Egypt to be, a land of plenty and green. In both of the Joshua passages, Joshua is speaking to the people, not regarding the strict sequence of events, but on their release from bondage in Goshen, and the deliverance through the Red Sea. If one were to push the border details, one might say that Joshua says that Jehovah dried up the water, “*as you were coming* out of Egypt.” They were not out yet; they were on their way out of the boundaries of Egypt proper.

One might expect Pharaoh to think territorially, as he led into battle and knew all the boundaries of his empire. Curiously, God says that “Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, ‘They are wandering aimlessly *in the land*; the wilderness has shut them in.’” The use of the definite article makes one wonder what land he speaks of? Is he speaking of the wilderness over 200 miles away on the other side

of the Sinai Peninsula, or is he speaking of *the land* of Egypt proper? Certainly, this “out of Egypt” theory is not conclusive.

Before the post-crossing routes are discussed, mention of prominent theories for a Gulf of Aqaba crossing would be helpful. One theory has the children of Israel leaving Rameses, traveling due east past the present-day Suez system, into the Wilderness of Shur, then traveling due south along the approximately 350 mile western Sinai coastal route around the tip of the Peninsula to the Straits of Tiran. Proponents of this view defend it, by pointing out the following points: the ease of travel on the coastal plain for over two million people, the compliance of the staging point for the crossing with Josephus’ description, and the crossing point itself regarding its depth and width. Also upon crossing the Strait, proponents feel there are various natural features and sites that follow the Biblical account as Israel moved in the direction of Jabal al Lawz.³⁵⁹

The problem with this view is not so much the distance, for with various reasonings about the response time of Pharaoh, and the catch up time of Pharaoh’s army to Moses’ efficiently moving caravan; one could allow for the 350 mile trip at 20 miles per day over about two and a half weeks. One can question however whether that much time can be read into the account. Also, one can allow for a faster rate, but much faster with many animals while in a *pursuit mode* diminishes feasibility. Also, as is the case with the Gulf of Suez, there are no remains of Pharaoh’s army under the Straits of Tiran. There is also debate on the distance

³⁵⁹ Bob Cornuke and Larry Williams made this view popular in the respective books quoted above; [The Mountain of God](#) and [The Mountain of Moses](#). Others who support this view include Jim Irwin, R. Knuteson, and K. Kluetz.

across the Strait.³⁶⁰ The problem that is most prominent is the same with any site on the Gulf of Aqaba, and that is the Biblical mandate established above that the wilderness Israel passed into upon exiting the sea was east of Egypt proper.

The other location on the Gulf of Aqaba that has become prominent for the staging of the crossing is Nuweiba, a large beach area jutting out into the Gulf about 40 miles south of Eliat.³⁶¹ This location is about 290 miles from Rameses, and one would have the same reservations mentioned above about this distance and the probable time it would take Pharaoh to reach them. The proponents see Etham at Eliat, at the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba. They turn back there and head into Wadi Haysi and then into Wadi Watri, which brings them to the Nuweiba Peninsula. This distance is roughly 80 map miles from Eliat. Some see these wadi's far too narrow for as many as two million people to transverse, others see it as a natural fit for the Scripture that says "the wilderness has shut them in," and of course Josephus' mountainous description of the site. Moller describes this theory in detail in his book.³⁶² What has been most interesting is the images in the

³⁶⁰ Bob Cornuke states in his book, on page 215, that the distance across the Strait is only 2 miles, yet Gordon Franz claims a nautical map of the area says it is four miles across to the first island, and 11 miles to the Saudi mainland. However, even if the distance was fourteen miles, and if the Jews were used to traveling at the rate of 20 miles per day, including the night travel, they could have made the crossing at 3.5 miles per hour (an average walking speed) in about four hours. Traveling speed of the Hebrews will be addressed in the next section.

³⁶¹ Ron Wyatt, Jonathan Gray, J. Pinkoski, Lennart Moller, and most recently a video produced by Discovery Media Productions [an arm of Campus Crusade for Christ], have made this site popular. Dr. Moller's book is replete with excellent photographs of alleged remnants of Pharaoh's army at the bottom of the Gulf. See *The Exodus Case* (Copenhagen: Scandinavia Publishing House, 2000).

³⁶² Moller, 169-195. Moller describes and illustrates his ideas about the likelihood of Pihahiroth, Migdol, and Baalzephon being at Nuweiba, as there are ruins there. The timing is discussed regarding Pharaoh's army, the mountain barrier, and in much detail, the alleged remains of Pharaoh's army on the "land bridge" across the Gulf at this spot.

video and in Moller's book regarding what looks like chariot parts at the bottom of the Gulf.³⁶³

There is one picture of a "gilded" wheel that does look very much like a chariot wheel as compared to drawings of Egyptian chariots from that era presented in the book. There are also very odd-looking coral formations that indeed could pass for various chariot parts. Once again, there are arguments against these conclusions that say these are not what they appear to be. Since nothing can be removed from the seabed, proof may not ever be forth coming. Some see these pictures as proof, and yet if they are chariot parts, did they have to come from the Exodus? Most importantly, amidst all the speculation, the Biblical account must be given priority. It clearly states that Israel exited the sea into the wilderness of Shur; we know this wilderness is east of and near the border of Egypt, as demonstrated above.

B. The Route From the Crossing to Sinai

In this section the post-crossing routes will be discussed as they relate to the location of Mt. Sinai. Once again, if Jabal al Lawz is to be a serious contender for the Biblical Mt. Sinai, then there has to be some reasonable correlation between the more substantial archeological sites, the Biblical record and the location of Jabal al Lawz. Feasibility must be demonstrated.

Upon exiting the Red Sea (Suez) into the Wilderness of Shur/Etham, after connecting with the Darb el Haj and traveling through Milta Pass, the Hebrews had roughly a 150-mile journey to Eliat, which is the most direct route to Midian

³⁶³ Moller, 205-229, and [The Exodus Revealed](#), video, Discovery Media Productions, 2001.

and Jebel el Lawz (Fig. 49).³⁶⁴ The Scriptures say in Numbers 33:8: “and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, and they went three days journey in the wilderness of Etham and camped at Marah. In Exodus 15:22-23 it says “Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the Wilderness of Shur, and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water, and they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah for they were bitter.”

Leaving the area around or above Ayun Musa, and traveling an average day’s journey of up to 23 miles, would roughly place Israel past the junction of the “Way of Shur” (Fig. 46), and about a day’s journey short of al Nakhel. On this route the Scripture says there was no water, and today that is also the case. For Israel not to have a source of water for three days, implies as Lucas points out: “Josephus states that the Israelites carried water with them and that they drank sheep’s milk. Their flocks would not necessarily have suffered from the water shortage because of the heavy mists and dew that leave the rocks moist during the winter.”³⁶⁵ However, they eventually come to water, and find it bitter. This does not have to correspond with a present day town or a pilgrim way station, for Exodus 15:23 says “*Israel it gave the name Marah.*” Lucas also notes that “that there are numerous bitter-water wells in the desert, and many wells in the region have been stopped up by sand dunes.”³⁶⁶ The Biblical account does not say it had palm trees, which would imply an oasis, so Marah could be anywhere along the Darb El Haj about a three-day journey from the Gulf of Suez. The water source

³⁶⁴ To give the best overall perspective of the author’s route, Palmers map has been altered in Fig. 49, on the east side of the crossing point to continue Israel’s journey toward Jabal al Lawz.

³⁶⁵ Har-El, 268.

³⁶⁶ Ibid. 269.

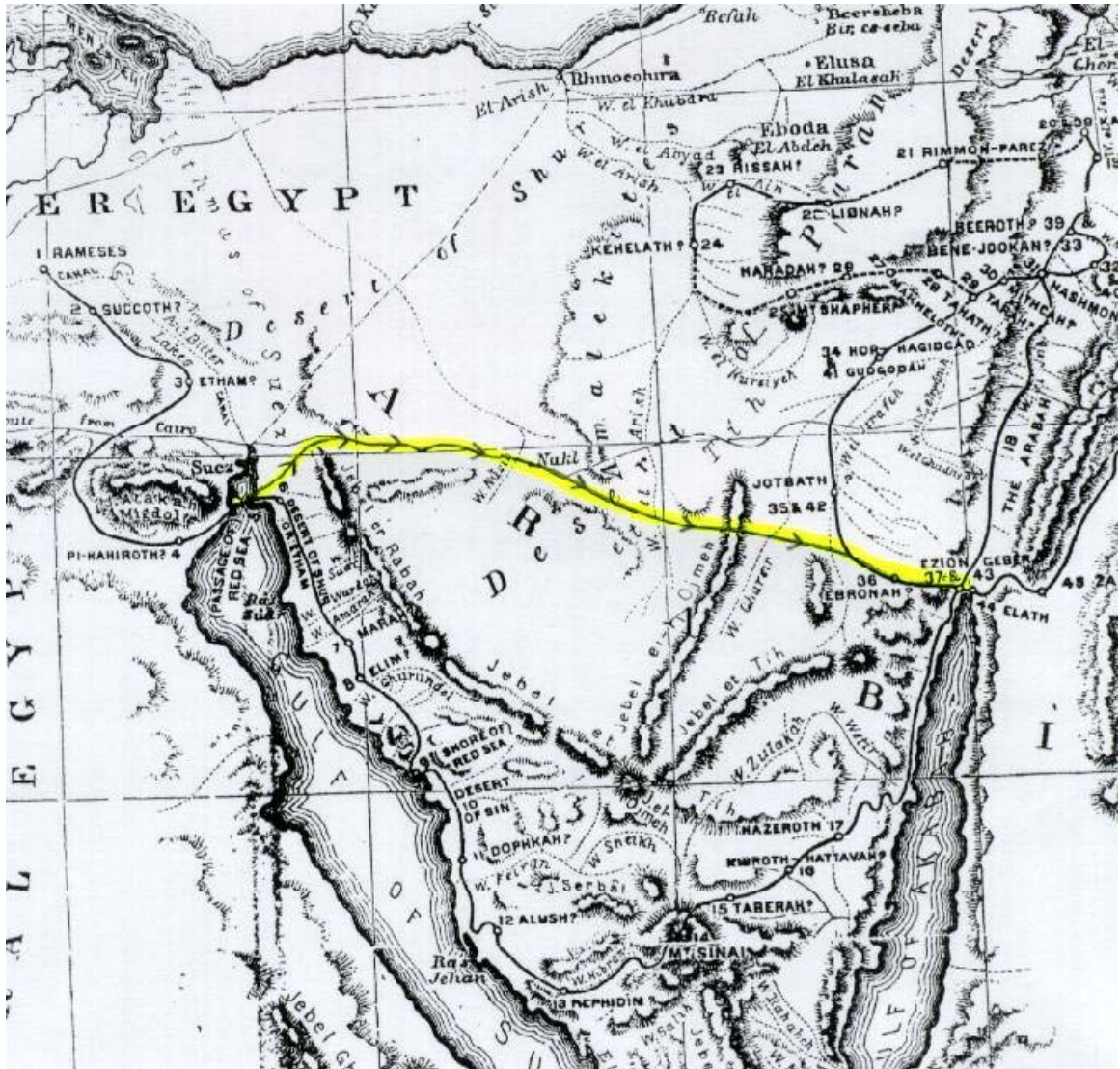


Fig. 49. Palmer's Map Altered – Proposed Route to Sinai. Palmer, *Desert of the Exodus*.

could have perished under the sands of the desert, or simply dried up over the millenniums.

The next leg of the journey is chronicled in Numbers 33:9: “and they journeyed from Marah and came to Elim; and in Elim there were twelve springs of water, and seventy palm trees and they camped there,” and in Exodus 15:27: “Then they came to Elim where twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters.” The Scripture does not say how long it took Israel to reach Elim, but they had plenty of time according to Exodus 16:1, for they had a month to reach Elim and beyond. It seems that near the city of Eliat or Elath would be a reasonable site to place the Biblical Elim. It has a substantial oasis there and fits other aspects of the Biblical description, besides being the logical next step on the Darb El Haj heading toward Midian and Jabal al Lawz. The Strong’s Concordance translates Elim as “palm trees.” The word “*elyim*” comes from the same Hebrew root as “*eylath*” or “*eloth*” or “*elath*” meaning trees or grove, which the concordance links to the city by that name on the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba.³⁶⁷ Lucas also makes this connection.³⁶⁸

Also, one may postulate whether the phrase “by the waters,” “*Mayim*” would refer to the springs or the nearby waters of the Gulf of Aqaba. Lucas points out that Josephus said that “the palm trees at Elim were very sparse [in his day] and the majority of its water was derived from wells, and could not be used for watering the trees.”³⁶⁹ Josephus confirms the palms in his day, though his term “sparse” for the number of palm trees is relative. Seventy palms could have been

³⁶⁷ Strong’s, p. 11 of Hebrew glossary.

³⁶⁸ Har-El, 269.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

sparse if they were spread over a camp area the size that would accommodate two million people. Musil describes Eliat in his day:

If we admit that the Israelites proceeded on the great transport route [Darb El Haj], we must locate Elim in the immediate vicinity of the modern settlement of al-‘Akaba, where there are countless springs, where at every spot it is possible to obtain water by digging to a depth of one-half meter to two meters, and where there are numerous palm trees.”³⁷⁰

The next stage of the journey is recorded in Exodus 16: 1 and Numbers 33:10-11. “ Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai on the fifteen day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt.”

Notice the cross-reference in Numbers 33: “And they journeyed from Elim and camped by the Red Sea, and they journeyed from the Red Sea and camped in the wilderness of Sin.” Obviously the Red Sea was located on the route to the Wilderness of Sin as implied in the Exodus account.

At this point it would be good to follow the map found in the book of Alois Musil, who as mentioned before did extensive travel and mapping in Midian or the extreme northwest corner of Saudi Arabia, or the Hejaz (Fig. 50).³⁷¹ As also seen on Har-El’s map the Darb El Haj takes a hard turn south along the

³⁷⁰ Musil, 268.

³⁷¹ The yellow highlighter follows a possible route of Israel to Rephidim, around the northwest to the foot or Sinai, and then their departure from Sinai, north toward Kadesh, passing again nearby Eliat or Elim. The exact route may vary due to better mountain passes or valleys not detectable on the maps provided.

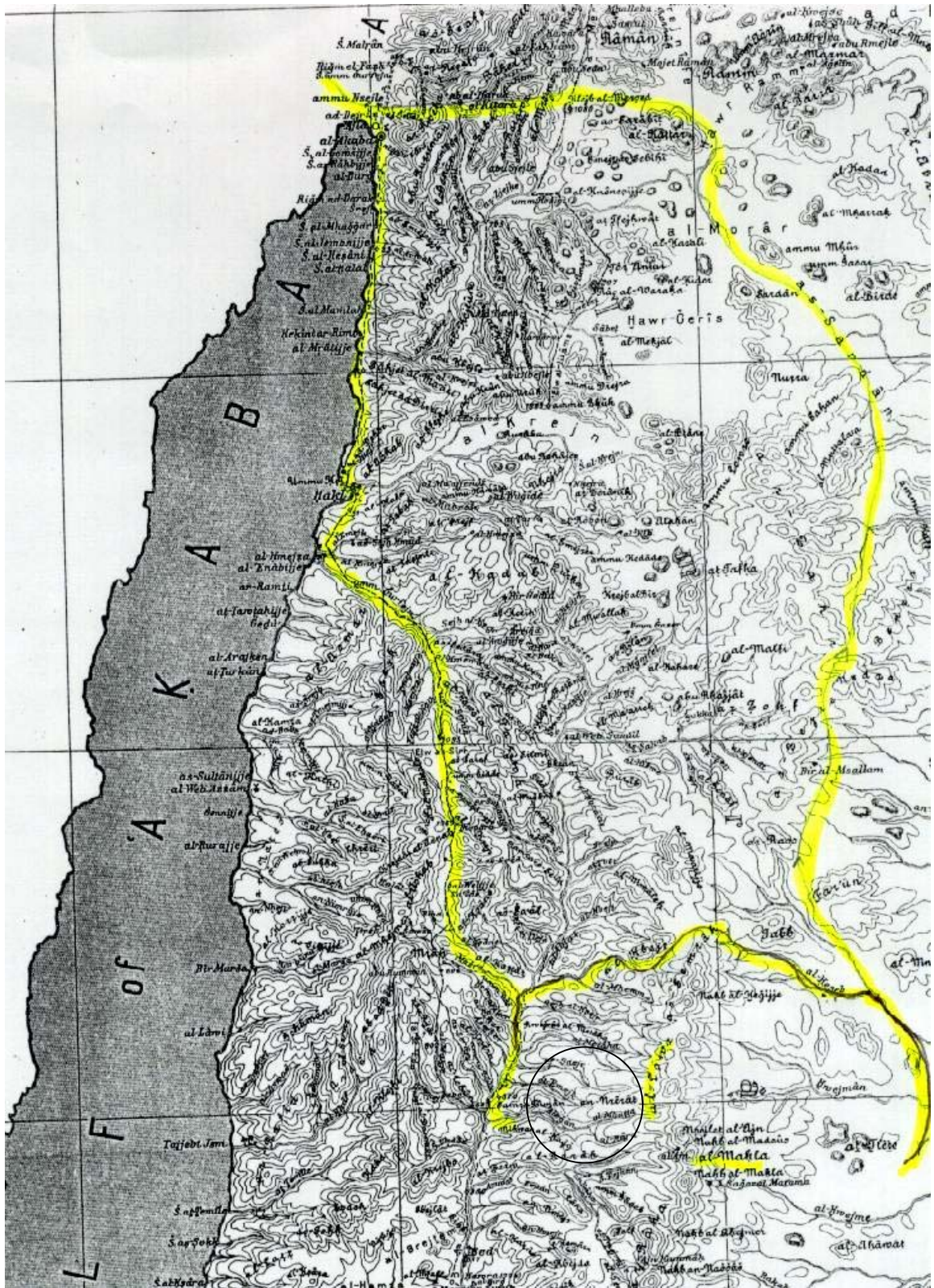


Fig. 50. Musil's Map of Midian. Detail Map. Alois Musil. The Northern Hegaz. (New York: American Geographical Society of New York, 1926). Circled area: is the proposed general area of Rephidim.

Red Sea for about a day's journey. Israel's camp on the Red Sea could have been at modern Haql before they turned inland down the Wadi al-Afal toward al Bad. Therefore, according to Exodus 16:1, the Hebrews made this trek within a month, which of course included the approximately 250-mile trip from Rameses to Elim and the additional 20-25 miles down to Haql.³⁷²

At this point it would be appropriate to address Judges 11:16. "For when they came up from Egypt, and Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh, then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, [from Kadesh] saying, 'Please let us pass through your land [...] So Israel remained at Kadesh.'" This account fits the route and location of Mt. Sinai at Jabal al Lawz. In verse 13, the sons of Ammon are referring to the Exodus as an event in the distant past. Therefore, when the messengers of Jephthah respond, the reference to coming out of Egypt does not mean Israel went across the Darb el Haj to the Gulf of Aqaba, and straight to Kadesh. That did not happen until after the eleven months at Sinai. But the route does fit the Jabal al Lawz location as they would leave Sinai, and perhaps backtracked by Eliat and the Red Sea,³⁷³ and then via the "Way of the Red Sea," to Kadesh (Fig. 46). From there they inquired about direct passage through Edom.³⁷⁴

³⁷² If Israel reached Marah in about a week from Rameses, and stayed, rested, and watered for several days to a week, and then took around four more days to reach Elim (Eliat) and then rested there for a week or so and then journeyed a day to the Red Sea camp mentioned below, and stayed several more days and went a day further into the wilderness of Sinai, then the distances and times fit. It is not known how long they stayed at Marah and Elim and the Red Sea Camp. It would stand to reason they were not in as much a hurry to break camp without the threat of the Egyptian army.

³⁷³ As will be discussed below, they could have taken another route from Sinai that would have brought them by the Gulf of Aqaba on the way to Kadesh without backtracking through the Wadi al Afal, up to Haql and then to Eliat.

³⁷⁴ In section C below, the whole itinerary from Sinai to Kadesh will be discussed. It will be pointed out that Israel could have come back to the Gulf of Aqaba by traveling northeast first into the Arabian

The next stages of the journey are described in Exodus 17:1: “Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin according to the command of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim and there was not water there.” Some more detail of the “stages” is given in Numbers 33:11-13: “And they journeyed from the Red Sea and camped in the wilderness of Sin, and they journeyed from the wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah, and they journeyed from Dophkah, and camped at Alush, and they journeyed from Alush, and camped at Rephidim; now it was there that the people had no water to drink.” The mountain country east of the Gulf of Aqaba would then correspond to the wilderness of Sin. The Hebrews would likely head down toward the Wadi al-Afal on the Darb el Haj and then at the junction of Wadis al Afal and al Abjaz move into the large open plain below the western slopes of Jebel el Lawz (Fig. 50). The stopping points of Dophkah and Alush, (probably on daily intervals at a much slower rate in the mountains), in the Hebrew both denote simply “an encampment in the desert.” This would of course fit this section of the journey.

Upon reaching Rephidim, with the events that took place there and then the two to three-day journey around the Lawz range to come to the east face of al Lawz and Makla [Sinai and Horeb], would correspond with the time frame of another 15 days to reach Sinai itself.³⁷⁵ It would be helpful to access the map

Wilderness (the great and terrible wilderness), then traveling north toward the King’s Highway and then taking a sharp turn west through a pass due east of Eliat and connected with Eliat, before they turned north/northwest on the Way of the Red Sea or the Way of Mount Seir toward Kadesh-Barnea.

³⁷⁵ It is believed that the building of Moses’ altar of sacrifice, the golden calf incident, and the 12 pillars being set up, happened on this eastern side of the mountain that forms a natural amphitheater toward the east. This is where Israel camped for so many months. The immediate area of the Moses altar and the pillars as seen earlier is called the *Holy Precinct*.

given in Fig. 13, to orient the reader with the area around Jabal al Lawz and the location of what is believed to be Rephidim in relation to the mountain.

Israel found no water at Rephidim and God brought water out of the rock there to quench Israel's thirst. In Exodus 17:6, it refers to "*the* rock at Horeb" It seems that it was a very distinctive rock that Moses had been aware of from his previous forty year stay in the area. This is pointed out by use of the definite article. Also, this account fits the geography around Lawz because a very prominent rock, that is split, as described earlier, sits out in a large open plain area, one the western side of the mountain (Fig. 51). This would explain being at Horeb/Sinai while at Rephidim and then later after traveling further they come again and yet for the first time to Horeb/Sinai. This fits as it would be a day or two journey around the range to get to the "holy precinct" on the eastern side of the range. The Scriptures tell us in Exodus 17:8-16, that Amalek *came* [as if to denote they were not indigenous to this area] and fought against Israel at this location. This large plain would definitely support a battle of the proportions described here, and there is a structure in this area that some believe could be the altar built at Rephidim for a memorial (Exodus 17:16). This altar was discussed earlier.

Franz gives an objection to this Rephidim location. "A third problem is the motivation of the Amalekites to attack Israel at Rephidim (Exodus 17:8-16). The Biblical records places the territory of the Amalekites around the area of Kadesh Barnea (Genesis 14:7) and the Negev (Numbers 13:29)."³⁷⁶ Harper's Bible Dictionary defines the Amalekites as "an ancient group of nomadic marauders,

³⁷⁶ Franz, 14.



Fig. 51. View of the Split Rock. Lennart Moller. The Exodus Case. 245. Courtesy of Jim and Penny Caldwell.

descendents of Esau's grandson Amalek (Gen. 36:12)[...] They occupied the desert south of Canaan, east of the Wilderness of Shur in Sinai Peninsula, and penetrated into northern Arabia and the Arabah north of Ezion-geber."³⁷⁷ If these nomadic marauders could have penetrated from Edom [lets say from Petra for argument], 120 miles into the Sinai Peninsula to the east, they could penetrate 80-100 miles more into Midian from Eliat area to test a nation they knew would eventually come knocking at their door. They were not conquering the land of Midian to inhabit it, no more than Midian was planning on inhabiting Israel in the days of the Judges when it made its marauding attacks into Canaan. Doubtless the Amalekites wanted to choose the battlefield, rather than fight them in their own land, where Israel could potentially overrun local Amalekite cities. If the Amalekites had any knowledge of the eventual destination of this horde, they knew they would be encountering them soon. If they had no idea of their future destination, they were acting as the marauders they were. Josephus offers similar opinions about the reasoning of the Amalekites regarding their decision to attack Israel.³⁷⁸

C. The Route from Sinai to the Crossing of the Jordan River

This section will review the route likely taken by Israel for the remainder of their forty years of wandering. The suggested route follows the Biblical accounts and uses the most substantiated archaeological sites as reference points

³⁷⁷ Madeleine Miller and Lane Miller, eds. Harper's Bible Dictionary. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973) 15.

³⁷⁸ Josephus, 67-68. It is interesting to note, that in the area designated as Rephidim, by this thesis, in a hut circle in the area Jim and Penny Caldwell found eight "sling stones." There are several references to the use of slings in Scripture: I Sam. 17, Judges 20:16, II Kings 3:25, II Chron. 26:14). "[...] bands of trained slingers were used by many early Mediterranean peoples in warfare..." Miller and Miller, Harper's Bible Dictionary, 689. Of course, whether these sling stones were actually Hebrew or Amalekite remains to be determined.

for the journey, such as Kadesh [Ein Qedis or Ein Qudeirat], Eliat, the Gulf of Aqaba as the Red Sea, and various roads, tracks, or ancient caravan routes shown in atlases and supported by scholars. Where there is some debate, i.e. “the great and terrible wilderness,” “the way of Mt. Seir,” and the phrase “around the land of Edom,” the author will seek to demonstrate their feasibility in relation to the thesis.

Thirteen months after the Exodus from Egypt and eleven months after their arrival at Sinai, Israel began to march toward Canaan. Notice Numbers 10:11-13:

Now it came about in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth of the month, that the cloud was lifted from over the tabernacle of the testimony; and the sons of Israel set out on their journeys from the wilderness of Sinai. Then the cloud *settled down* in the wilderness of Paran. So they moved out for the first time, according to the commandment of the Lord through Moses.

This is a summary of Israel’s overall movement from Sinai to Kadesh and Kedesh to the Jordan River crossing. Kadesh is in the Wilderness of Paran, as will be noted later, and “the settling down” of the cloud does not denote the next stop of their journey from Sinai as a day or two, but a much more lengthy stay, which was the case at Kadesh. Again: “Thus they set out from the mount of the Lord three days journey, with the ark of the covenant of the Lord journeying in front of them for the three days to seek out a resting place for them” (Numbers 10:33). Again: “Then we set out from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible

wilderness which you saw, on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, just as the Lord our God commanded us, and we came to Kadesh-Barnea”(Deut. 1:19). Also: “He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint” (Deut. 8:15). This is the first reference to the great and terrible wilderness. It was not mentioned in association with the wilderness of Sin on the route coming in across the mountains surrounding al Bad. It may be referring to the wilderness region to the west of Jabal al Lawz. Certainly this expansive desert could fit this description (Fig. 52).

Therefore, Israel may have headed west/northwest into the Arabian Desert, and then moved north along the hill country to the west. Then they would have turned west and come through the southern section of the mountains of Seir heading toward Eliat through a pass in the mountains. This bringing them toward the vicinity of the Red Sea *from which* quail were delivered a day’s journey on either side of their camp (Numbers 11:31). Once again this will correspond with Judges 11:16, as mentioned above, where Israel went through the wilderness [Arabian Desert] to the Red Sea (Gulf of Aqaba) and came to Kadesh.” This last leg from Eliat would follow the way of Mt. Seir as shown in the HarperCollins Atlas.³⁷⁹

There is another description of this trip after Miriam’s rebellion in Numbers 12:16: “Afterward, however, the people moved out from Hazeroth and camped in the Wilderness of Paran.” Hazeroth seemed to be still east of the Arabah or the Red Sea, as will be noted below, and Kadesh is in the wilderness of

³⁷⁹ Pritchard, 35.

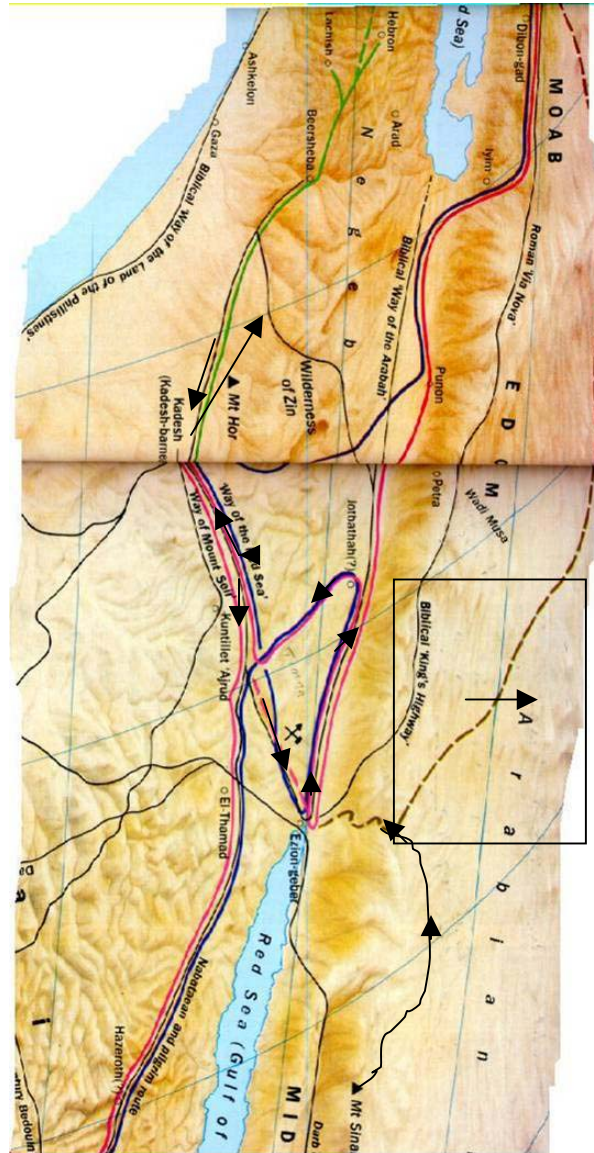


Fig. 52. Route to Kadesh/Route of Wanderings. [Arrow and box denote area where Israel may have “Skirted” Mt. Seir.] James Pritchard, *HarperCollins Atlas of the Bible*. (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991) 34-35. Arrows and lines denote direction Israel took enroute to Kadesh and away from Kadesh eventually to the Jordan River.

Paran, so this verse shows progression into the final leg of the journey from Sinai. When Israel arrives at the area of Kadesh, they stage the spying of the land from the south of Canaan.

After the bad report is processed, God tells Israel they need to head south (Numbers 14:25), to the wilderness via the “way of the Red Sea,” which according to Pritchard, begins on the same route as the way of Mt. Seir, but goes directly south, and does not turn and head east toward Mt. Seir before it too heads south along the range. Israel however does not follow God’s command and they try to attack the people of the land. The Amalekites and Canaanite repulse them. In Numbers 14:45 it states that “ the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down, and struck them and beat them down as far as Hormah.” Deuteronomy 1:44,46 describe the same event: “And the Amorites who lived in the hill country come out against you and chased you as bees do, and crushed you from Seir to Hormah.” After this encounter, Numbers 20:1: “The sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin, in the first month, and the people stayed at Kadesh.” Also, “So you remain at Kadesh for many days, the days that you spent there” (Duet. 1:46).

Depending on the location of Hormah, Israel moved back toward Kadesh, which seemed to border both wildernesses, Paran and Zin. The next events described in the life of the Hebrews must have been lived out in the “many days in Kadesh.” However, they could have been at Kadesh an unknown number of days, and then these events may have taken place elsewhere, later in the forty years. Several events took place before they leave the Kadesh area, i.e. Miriam’s

death, the stand off with Edom, Aaron's death, and the battle with the Arad people.

In the wilderness around Kadesh, the people complain about no water and Moses wrongly *strikes* the rock and God punishes Moses (Numbers 20:2-13). In Numbers 20:14-17, Moses has his next encounter with Edom. Moses it seems wanted to go directly through the Seir range, the mountains of Edom, to the east side of the Arabah, and continue on the Kings Highway. Notice verse sixteen “now behold, we are at Kadesh, a town on the edge of your territory[...].” Unless Kadesh is in the eastern edge of the mountains of Edom near the Kings Highway in the Arabian Desert, then this also confirms the most prominent location of Kadesh. This however, might place Edom's territory too far west for some scholars.

In Numbers 20:17, Moses describes the route as going through the land and then connecting with the Kings Highway, possibly at Petra.³⁸⁰ Edom however says no, and they came out against Israel with a strong army to engage them if they tried. This was not the plan of God, so Numbers 20:22-24 continues the next stage of the journey: “They set out from Kadesh, the sons of Israel, the whole congregation came to Mt. Hor, by the border of the land of Edom [this could be north or south of Kadesh along Edom's western border],³⁸¹ saying ‘Aaron shall be gathered to his people.’” Then Israel encounters the Canaanite people of Arad

³⁸⁰ There is some debate whether the King's Highway passed through Petra [Sela]; the route comes near the Edomite capitol. There may have been a mountain route less traveled.

³⁸¹ It may have been further north as next Israel engages the Arad people in the Negev. (Numbers 21:1) Yet the verse says the Arad people lived in the Negev and attacked them by the way of Atharim or “south country.”

(Numbers 21:1-3) somewhere in the vicinity of mount Hor, near the Negev, south of Canaan and defeats them.

Then a major turn in the itinerary takes place as noted in Numbers 21:4: “Then they set out from Mt. Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go *around the land of Edom*, and the people became impatient because of the journey.” Deuteronomy 2:1-4 says: “Then we turned and set out for the *wilderness by the way of the Red Sea*, as the Lord spoke to me and *circled* Mt. Seir for many days [...] You have *circled* this mountain long enough. Now turn north, and command the people saying, ‘You will pass through the territory of your brothers the sons of Esau who live in Seir.’” Israel now takes the route south by which they came to Kadesh, that leads toward Eliat at the Red Sea, and travels around the southern border of Edom or Seir to continue their wandering in the Arabian desert. The words *circled*, probably is not the best translation of the Hebrew word Moses wrote down. One of the meanings given is “bordered.” The New International Version uses the term “skirted.” This would lead one to believe that they passed the Red Sea going east and wandered for many years [20-30?] in the desert bordering Edom on the eastern side of Edom. When Moses eventually directs Israel toward the conquest of Canaan again via the Jordan River, he says they should turn “north,” i.e. from wandering in the Arabian desert south of Edom they would move in a northern direction from there to encounter the “sons of Esau in Seir.”

In Numbers 21:4-9, once again as the people move south along the Way of the Red Sea, they begin to complain that they have no food or water (v. 5). This may indicate they have reached the same “great and terrible wilderness” again

where they passed through earlier with fiery serpents and no water (Deut 1:19, 8:15-16). This is the wilderness they passed through coming up from Horeb to Kadesh. Deut 1: 19 says this was the wilderness that they saw *on the way to the hill country of the Amorites*. This would be in line with what happens next as the Lord punishes their complaints with the attacks of fiery serpents, as a feature associated with the great and terrible wilderness. Thus, the great and terrible wilderness is likely not the desert south of Kadesh on the way to the Red Sea, nor any desert farther south in the Sinai, as one would fit the place-names and route sequence into the Jabal al Lawz location for Sinai. In the verses following the serpent attack, Numbers 21:10-12, it seems to indicate that Israel moved north in successive camps to Oboth and Iyehabarim that made them arrive in the wilderness which is opposite Moab to the east. This correlates with Deuteronomy 2:3, where after many years they finally turn north to head toward conquering Canaan from east of the Jordan. One would have to see a long time lapse between Numbers 21:9 and 10, as the incident with the fiery serpents probably took place when they first arrived back in the great and terrible wilderness from Kadesh near the southeast border of Seir, which would be the route Israel followed when they came up from Sinai (Jebel el Lawz)

To summarize this section, it would be helpful to study the words of Moses. Deuteronomy 1:1, and 2:7-8 says: “ These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan [east of Jordan] in the wilderness [which wilderness?] in the Arabah opposite Suph [if Suph corresponds the Gulf of Aqaba, this would be a wilderness east of Eliat] between Paran and Tophel [Paran

the city, if it corresponds to the Wilderness of Paran could be located on the western border of the area Moses is describing] and Laban and Hazeroth and Dizahab.” This would comply with the location of Hazeroth (Numbers 11:35, 12:16, 33:17), as noted above, east of the Arabah and before they entered into the wilderness of Paran.

Then notice Moses words, still speaking from the location mentioned directly above: “For the LORD your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through *this great wilderness* [...] So we passed beyond our brothers the sons of Esau, [leaving Kadesh south on the road to the Red Sea] who live in Seir, by the way of the Arabah, by Elath, and by Ezion-geber [clearly the route described above]³⁸² and we turned [here a reference to the eventual turn north toward Moab] and passed through by way of the wilderness Moab”(Deuteronomy 2:7-8). Once again, Moses reference to “the great wilderness” would correspond with the “great and terrible wilderness.” Both Deuteronomy 2:9ff and Numbers 21:10ff, describe Israel’s journey on to the Jordan crossing.

D. The Distance From Jabal al Lawz to Kadesh-(Deuteronomy 1:2)

³⁸² One might question here why Moses did not call Elath or Ezion-geber by the name which Israel gave to their camp in the area, Elim, if indeed they are one in the same, as mentioned earlier in this section. As noted above, both words have similar Hebrew origin and mean a “place of trees,” “grove of trees” (palms). Israel named this stop, as in many cases, by what they found at the site. It may have been either that these places were not established or well known places forty years earlier, or simply that Elim was located in the area, but separate from either Elath or Ezion-geber. Har-el comments that Ezion-geber was not built until the reign of Solomon, based on I Kings 9:26 and II Chronicles 8:17., p. 98. Actually the passage says that Solomon built a fleet of ships in Ezion-geber, not built the city. According to Moses, these towns were in existence at least toward the end of their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Har-el believes Eliat (Elath or Eloth) was an Edomite coastal city situated at Aqaba, east of Ezion-geber, p. 191. Today, Eliat is on the northwestern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, and Aqaba on the northeast shore. Elim, may simply have been the name the Jews chose for their camp at that time, the names used in the passages above by Moses may have been what the settlement became known as later, or have simply been separate established settlements which Israel avoided upon camping there.

In recent years writers from archaeological magazines have cast certain doubt on Jabal al Lawz as Mt. Sinai due to Deuteronomy 1:2: “It is eleven days’ journey from Horeb by the way of Mt. Seir to Kadesh-barnea.” Bryant Wood in a brief editorial article in the year 2000 issue of *Bible and Spade* dismisses Jabal al Lawz by saying the distance to Kadesh from the Arabian mountain is simply too long. He feels that the average rate of speed for such a large group could have only been six miles a day or less, thus demanding that the real Mt. Sinai be at the most only sixty miles from Kadesh.³⁸³ Wood quotes G.I. Davies as saying that traveling in the Sinai on camelback would produce an average rate of “about 20 miles per day or a little less. Donkey and camel caravans can average between 16 and 23 mi per day depending on the terrain.”³⁸⁴ He then gives examples from the ancient past of an Egyptian army that averaged about 15 miles a day in easy terrain that slowed to about 7 miles a day in more rugged landscape. Wood then looks to the Biblical example of Ezra’s journey from Babylon to Jerusalem in Ezra 7 and 8, and calculates a 9.5-mile per day average for Ezra and his large retinue on a well-traveled route. However, Wood concludes that the Hebrews were “pastoralists,” and slows them down to no more than 6 miles a day because of the animals. He views the group as those who determine their rate totally by the grazing whims of their animal population. Both Wood and Har-El both quote Condor as saying that modern day Bedouin do not go faster than six miles per day when they move camp.³⁸⁵ Anati says a camel-riding modern Bedouin family can

³⁸³ Bryant Wood, “Beneath The Surface.” *Bible and Spade*. 13. 4 (2000) 98-99.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ Har-El, 270. Bryant, 99.

travel between 12 and 15 miles a day, but does not see camels a part of the Exodus.³⁸⁶

Calculating the distance from Jabal al Lawz to Ein Qedis or Ein Qudeirat via the route laid above, one would estimate around 200 map miles. If Israelite and animal walked at the leisurly rate of 3 miles per hour, if they averaged eight hours per day for eleven days, that would bring them 264 miles. Subtract one day for the Sabbath this would bring them 240 miles. Keeping in mind this is an average rate, some days they may only travel at 2 miles per hour in the more difficult terrain, and speed up to 3.5 miles per hour in the easier days. Some days they may have traveled six hours and other days eight to ten. At 2.5 miles per hour for 8 hours, a reasonable rate for strong and seasoned travelers who have been in the wilderness for over a year, the average days journey would be around 20 miles. This is why it is more reasonable to think of the eleven days' journey, not as the actual time it took Israel to reach Kadesh, though it is quite feasible, but as the average time it takes most travelers to reach it.

G. I. Davies work, The Significance of Deuteronomy 1:2 for the Location of Mount Horeb is probably the most thorough and scholarly treatment of the subject. He says "the 'day's journey' was still in use as a unit of measure among the Bedouin in the last century"[1800's].³⁸⁷ In the case of Deuteronomy 1:2 he says, "Here at least the figures cannot be based on the speed at which a particular person or group traveled (which we could not know), but must be the norm for the

³⁸⁶ Anati, 178.

³⁸⁷ G. I. Davies, "The Significance of Deuteronomy 1:2 for the Location of Mount Horeb" *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*. 111. 87-101, (1979): 96.

journey in question.”³⁸⁸ He goes on to say, “On the other hand, since the average has to be stated in terms of a range of possible values, the overall calculation will inevitably give only an approximate answer, which will be useful for eliminating certain proposed sites rather than for establishing positively the case for one site.”³⁸⁹

Davies then looks at three Bible passages in an effort to determine an average figure for a day’s journey. From Genesis 31:23, Davies points out, despite what Condor says about the rate of six miles per day with this kind of group (large amounts of animals) that amazingly Jacob’s rate of travel might have been 45 miles a day. He however, feels the *text must be defective at this point* and dismisses it as a reliable indication of the length of a day’s journey. From II Kings 3:9, he determines the movement of Jehoram’s army at about 11 to 17 miles per day. He also concludes on this point that the speed of an army on the march, especially a long march, would likely be slower than the average (16-23 miles per day). The third passage in Jonah 3:3, was deemed not specific enough to be helpful.

Davies then looks for extra-biblical evidence from several areas: the region of Mesopotamia, the Classical World, the length of stages on Pilgrimages, and data from modern times. Describing a caravan traveling 220 miles in a desert area, they would expect to arrive at their destination in ten days, about 22 miles per day.³⁹⁰ Information quoted regarding the location of Assyrian staging posts on royal roads puts a day’s journey from 20 to 30 miles. Herodotus gives the

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Davies, 90.

³⁹⁰ Davies, 93.

equivalent of a day's journey in one place at 22 miles and in another place 16.5 miles.³⁹¹ "For ordinary travel [in the classical world] it has been estimated that 'A foot passenger in good training might expect to walk from 26-27 Roman miles in the day', which would be about 25 English miles."³⁹²

Davies conclusions on the subject include a survey of the main authorities, which reveal a camel caravan averaging about 2 and one-third miles per hour, while a donkey caravan would travel 2 and three-quarters miles per hour. In normal circumstances not more than seven or eight hours a day, the camel caravan could manage 16 – 19 miles per day and the donkey caravan 19 – 22 miles per day. Other sources give the average days journey distance at 20 – 30 miles.

Davies places the entourage of the Hebrews in the category of caravan that travels from 16-23 miles per day.³⁹³ So, he concludes that the distance from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by the route indicated will have been between 180 and 250 miles. He also remarks in the same paragraph that this figure would render locations too close to Kadesh as not tenable. Wood's calculations, based on the idea that Israel was moving as pastoralists, would then be disqualified by Davies' conclusions. Wood limits the location of Mt Sinai to 60 or so miles from Kadesh. Davies concludes that the distance must be between 180 to 250 miles; sixty miles would be much too close.

Again, by looking at the likely routes to and from an Arabian location for Mt. Sinai, while acknowledging the most archaeologically sound locations of key

³⁹¹ Davies, 93-94

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Davies, 96.

stopping points and landmarks, one can construct feasible routes in line with Scripture to Jabal al Lawz, as the best candidate for the sacred mountain.

VII. Conclusions

With the many varied arguments given in this paper demonstrating the Biblical significance of Jabal al Lawz, this site in Saudi Arabia remains the best candidate for Mt. Sinai/Horeb. It is unlikely at this point that the Saudi Arabian Department of Antiquities and Museums will publish any more information and conclusions about the history and archaeology of Jabal al Lawz, even if anything new is found. One feels that the latest publication Al Bid History and Archaeology is their final word on the area. It would be unfortunate if this fascinating site is shut off from Western archaeologists without further investigation. A far more comprehensive investigation of and report on the site could be done. There are other important sites in the immediate area, as noted above, that the Saudi's did not include in their survey.

At the time of the completion of this paper, April 2002, the latest significant information coming from Saudi Arabia about the site, as well as the latest conclusions by various scientists and scholars has been included. Doubtless other information and opinion will be published on the subject in the months and years to come. Of course, the author is not privy to all the private opinions circulating on the issue or evidence and arguments that are not in the public domain. However, the sources consulted for this dissertation are the most knowledgeable on the site and have the most update information and conclusions concerning it.

It is the author's desire to continue to be appraised of any new information about the site of Jabal al Lawz or the surrounding region. If any reader is made aware of any new pertinent information about the mountain, please contact the author. Please consult the Profile at the end of this paper.

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PROFILE

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