

ARTICLE

Traditions of Mt Sinai

Introduction

Throughout history, scholars and biblical archaeologists have studied the wanderings of the Israelites through the desert in the way to Canaan to find clues on the exact location of Mt Sinai.

Flavius Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities*, amongst other historians, has contributed to the description of the Exodus account according to his contemporary knowledge.

The theme of Mt Sinai location has also become popular recently. Pope Francis' visit to the traditional site has prompted journalists to present his own thoughts: "Am I visiting the right place?"¹

This is evidence that the search for Mt. Sinai is not a new subject.

The Bible does not provide a precise location for the Sinai, it rather describes the mountain in relation to larger areas, i.e. the desert of Sin, the desert of Paran or the land of Midian.

In Numbers 33 many places described as the stages of the journey to the Canaan are not easily identified geographically due to the fact that they were probably named by the Israelites as they advanced towards it. Therefore the names of localities such as Succoth ('camp of booths' or 'shelter for the first night'), was probably given in relation to the steps of the journey.²

The lack of archaeological evidence related to the wilderness journey and to the settlement of the Israelites in Egypt has even led some distinguished scholars to declare that there has never been such an event as the Exodus of the Israelites.³

However this view has not been accepted by the majority of the academic body.

There are as many as thirteen different locations claimed as Mt Sinai.⁴

¹ Hendel, Mt.Sinai (website).

² Todd, *Light*, 85.

³ Wit, *Route*, 3.

⁴ Whittaker, *Significance*, 7.

The aim of this essay is to discuss three main places: Jebel Musa, Har-Karkom and Jebel al-Lawz, drawing the reader's attention to the latter as in the last three decades it has led some scholars to reconsider their opinions and accept it as the best candidate for Mt. Sinai.

I - The tradition Regarding the Location of Mount Sinai

The search for Mt. Sinai was a popular quest in the nineteenth century, when travellers and explorers roamed the Sinai Peninsula looking for vestiges of the children of Israel.

However, decades of research led to little progress, even by great scholars like Edward Palmer and Edward Robinson.

Later in the 1920's, the search was put to rest as not a single archaeological evidence that would shed light into the Exodus narrative was found.

As mentioned earlier there are as many as thirteen sites for Mt Sinai, nine possible crossing points of the Red Sea and eight alleged places called Kadesh Barnea.⁵

In the Third Century A.D. pilgrims visited the south of the Egyptian Peninsula and inspired by the symbols and inscriptions on the rocks they deliberately named one of the mountains as Mt Sinai. Such was the enthusiasm that Emperor Constantine, in the fourth century, sent his mother to confirm through her psychic powers the correctness of the alleged pilgrims' beliefs.

Thus from that time until our modern age a mountain in the South Peninsula of Egypt has been accepted as 'the traditional place' of Mt Sinai and is often viewed by some scholars as the true place.

The quest for Mt Sinai did not stop there as many archaeologists proposed other places.

⁵ *Whittaker, Significance, 7.*

In the 1980's, Emmanuel Annati argued in favour of Har Karkom in southern Israel, next to the Egyptian border and others have defended different locations. However, in 1983, Ron Wyatt, an adventurer and former nurse anaesthetist, crossed with his two sons the borders of Jordan as far as Northwest Arabia and guided by a 'divine inspiration' discovered the intriguing Jabal al-Lawz, which they claimed to be the real Mt Sinai.

Later in June of 1988, two other adventurers, Bob Cornuke and Larry Williams managed to reach Jebel al-Lawz making a report of the place.

After been detained by the Saudi police for thirty-eight hours they eventually came back to US and reported their findings which they believed would have political and religious implications for many years to come.⁶

Soon after Bob's and Larry's visit to Jebel al-Lawz, the Saudi authorities fenced the site of Jebel al-Lawz and prohibited the entrance of any unauthorized person in the area.

After this brief introduction to the topic of Mt. Sinai in relation to the three main places I will examine the implications of each one of them emphasizing Jebel al-Lawz.

A – Was the Sinai Peninsula in the Land of Egypt?

In the Exodus narrative there are several passages that confirm that the Israelites came *out of* the land of Egypt as God set them free from slavery (Exo. 12:42, 13:3).

When Moses killed the Egyptian and fled from Pharaoh he came to Midian which has always been geographically identified at the northwest part of Saudi Arabia. It would not make sense for Moses to flee from Egypt and

⁶ Williams, *Mountain*, 44-46.

hide in the South Egyptian Peninsula for forty years as it was under Egyptian control due to the exploitation of the turquoise mines.

In 1 Samuel 15:7 we also find a description of the ancient eastern border of Egypt which was to the east of the Egyptian Peninsula next to the desert of Shur.

The popular saying that the South Peninsula of Egypt was considered Arabia in Paul's lifetime is not correct.

The Egyptian Peninsula has always been known as an Egyptian territory since Abraham's time, except for a short period of time when the Roman emperor Trajan conquered Egypt in AD 106, and it came to be known as Arabia.⁷

Therefore we should not misuse Paul's quotation in Galatians 4:25, addressing the South Peninsula of Egypt as Arabia as it did not correspond to Paul's lifetime.

B – Is Mount Sinai in Arabia?

The Old Testament scholar Martin Noth suggests that the description of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire goes back to the Sinai tradition (Hab. 3:3-7) which refer to the phenomenon of an active volcano. The simple reference to a storm might be a weakening of that tradition.⁸

'If the Sinai theophany is to be viewed as the eruption of a volcano', says Noth, 'we have to discard the possibility of the mountain being located in the Sinai Peninsula which has no such geological activities, we rather should turn to the other side of gulf of *el-aqaba*, at the north-west side of Saudi Arabia which has active volcanoes even today.'⁹

⁷ Rudd, Sinai, (web).

⁸ Noth, *Exodus*, 160.

⁹ Noth, *Exodus*, 156.

According to A. von Gall, there is a number of passages from classical Arab geographers that support the idea that Midian is without a doubt to the east of the Gulf of Aqaba, or in north-west Arabia and Mt Sinai is closely related to that area. Interestingly, the ancient Jews like Paul always believed that Mt. Sinai was in Arabia.¹⁰

In Galatians 4:25, Paul connects those bound by the law with Hagar's children, the slave woman. He wisely identifies the Sinai in Arabia because that is where the descendants of Ishmael used to live.

J. Dunn explains that one of the reasons for Paul's geographical information was to clarify to his readers the location of Mt Sinai as being at the Nabatean centre of El-Hegra in the north-west part of the Arabian Peninsula.¹¹

Longenecker goes further and adds that Paul's purpose in adding an apparent mundane bit of geographical information in a highly polemical text was to show that Mt. Sinai is under pagan territory and out of Jewish control.¹²

II - The routes into the wilderness

A study on the routes to Mt. Sinai is crucial if we want to have a better understanding of the subject. It will point us to the right direction where Mt. Sinai is.

A – The eastern routes out of Egypt

¹⁰ Rudd, Sinai, (web).

¹¹ Dunn, *Galatians*, 251.

¹² Longenecker, *Galatians*, 211.

One could argue, 'Why would Yahweh lead his people through the road of the wilderness towards the Red Sea, when the shortest route was through Philistia?' The purpose of God guiding them through the wilderness towards the Red Sea was not only to spare his people from war (Exo. 13:17), but also to teach the Egyptians and their gods a lesson¹³.

K. Kitchen in his book *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, describes three possible routes taken by the Israelites after leaving Goshen: the northern, the central and the southern routes. He says that the Hebrews after leaving the East Delta of the Nile went directly towards the Sinai Peninsula.¹⁴

In Exodus and Numbers it is said that the Israelites made three stops before crossing the Red Sea: at Succoth, Etham and near Migdol, but the Bible does not say how many days they took before the crossing of the Red Sea. Kitchen presumes that they took two days to travel from Goshen to Etham, but as he defends the idea that the crossing occurred at the Suez Canal he struggles to fit all the locations described in the Bible within the nine miles distance between Goshen and the Suez crossing point.¹⁵

However, Kitchen agrees that the Hebrew term *yam suph* (which can be translated as 'Sea of Reeds' or 'Red Sea') refers to both, the Gulf of Suez (Exo. 10:19) and the Gulf of Aqaba (Num 21:4).

The northern route can easily be discarded as it was not only the way to Philistia but also was heavily guarded by several military Egyptian forts along the way (according excavations from the eighteenth century) and any attempt to escape through it would have been suicidal.¹⁶

The central route, between the northern coast with its sand dunes and the rocky terrain is almost devoid of water. But as Kitchen describes, it is the

¹³ Dozeman, *Commentary*, 45.

¹⁴ Kitchen, *Reliability*, 268.

¹⁵ Kitchen, *Reliability*, 259-61.

¹⁶ Kitchen, *Reliability*, 267.

only route which would favour a Sinai destination in Edom or in Midian, in northwest Arabia.

Kitchen argues that the central route towards the Gulf of Aqaba would not fit the conditions across the Et-Tih shield and would be loaded with improbabilities (See Fig. 1).

Therefore, his conclusion is that the most probable route would be the south route across the Suez coastline to the Sinai Peninsula (See Fig. 2). He argues that this route would clear the Israelites of almost all Egyptian presence. But what about the Egyptian military bases guarding the turquoise mines?

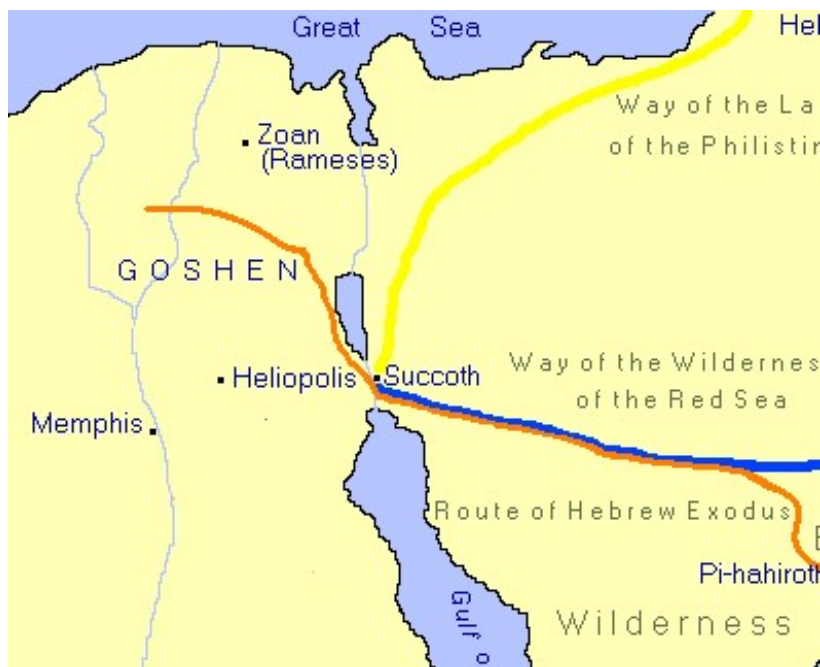


Fig. 1 – The centre route through the wilderness towards the Red Sea.

<http://www.biblebelievers.org.au>

Kitchen says that the mines were guarded by the Egyptians only a few weeks during the winter (Nov-Dec) and that would not coincide with the period when the Israelites were fleeing from Egypt (Mar-Apr).¹⁷

It seems that he overlooked the biblical data that the people of Israel remained in the Sinai desert for eleven months which included the next winter period, not to mention their forty years of wanderings through the desert.

They arrived at Sinai in the first day of the third month of the first year (Exo. 19:1) and left on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year (Num. 10:11-13), so they would have certainly met the Egyptians at the mines located in south-central Sinai.

Another issue is that, if the Israelites had taken the south route, the Bible description would probably have been, 'and they took the route along the coastline of the Red Sea', but Exodus 13:18 says, 'So God led the people around by the desert road *towards* the Red Sea. For this reason we will assume they took the central route by the desert, towards the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba.

¹⁷ Kitchen, *Reliability*, 268.

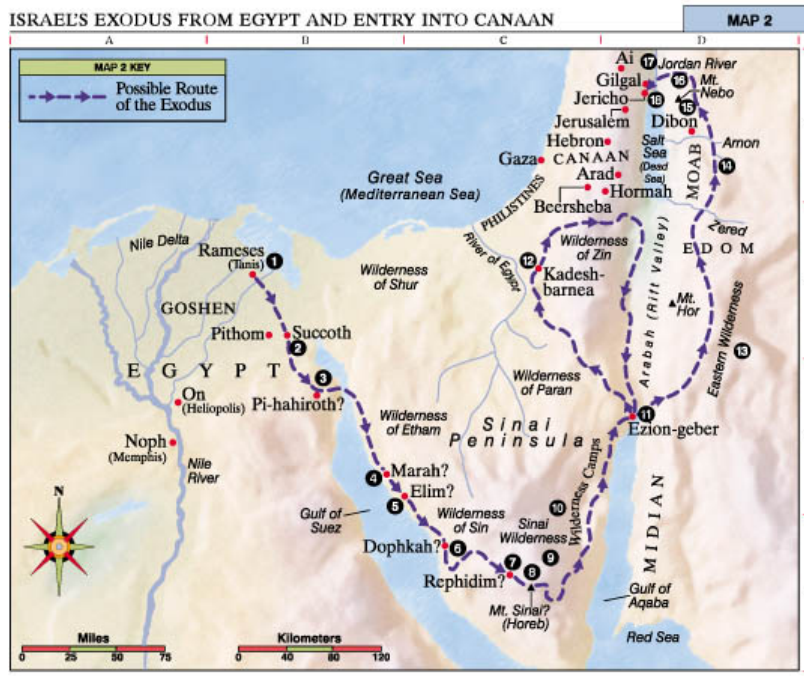


Fig. 1 – The south traditional route

(<http://www.davidicke.com/forum/showthread.php?t=165037&page=3>)

B – From Goshen to the Red Sea

Did the Israelites cross the Red Sea in the area of the Gulf of Suez? Was it a *yam suph* “Sea of Reeds” as some Hebrew interpretations? Did they cross it at the Gulf of Aqaba, or at the Strait of Tiran?

Augustine Scott (sharing Kitchen’s opinion) categorically says, ‘The crossing of the Red Sea took place in the Suez Canal.’¹⁸

When we analyse the Exodus account, looking for clues given in the text itself, and considering also the opinion of historians, we come to a different conclusion. A detailed study based on the biblical information of this first part of the journey is crucial and after some reflection it is likely that some scholars have possibly overlooked the biblical data out of a biased view.¹⁹

¹⁸ Stock, *Wilderness*, 2.

¹⁹ Rudd, *Exodus*, (web).

We start from the premise that it is possible to come to a fairly reasonable conclusion on the location of Mt Sinai based on scriptural testimony and archaeological findings.

The Israelites first stopped at Succoth, the place that Kitchen identifies as the Theku (or Tell el-Maskhuta) at Qantir, southeast of Ramses.

This place of Succoth is identified as Tell el-Maskhuta by Egyptian archaeological records. A Roman inscription dated from beginning of the fourth century affirms that the distance between Tell el-Maskhuta and Clysma (Suez) is nine miles.²⁰

The location of the first campsite would normally set the course of direction for the Israelites' journey. Thus Succoth which is believed to be in the region of Theku (also called T'aru or Takut) at the west of Lake Timsah had to be a considerably large place in order to accommodate around 2.5 million of Israelites (600,000 males aged 20-60 plus women and children). Succoth was a fort constructed at the border of Egypt to serve as base for the expeditions into Syria. Adolf Erman explains in his book:

"The line of fortifications which was intended to keep back these Bedouins of the Delta, is met with as early as the time of the Middle Empire, and is still standing. It consisted of a wall strengthened by small towers...this formed an obstruction which the slaves who tried to escape from Egypt, and the Bedouins who wanted to pasture their cattle on the fields of the delta, found difficult to pass. At this time we also meet with a defensive work of another kind, namely a broad canal, which presumably connected the lakes of the isthmus together. At the point where a bridge crossed this canal were strong fortresses on both sides... The great fortress which defended this bridge was the fortress of T'aru', which is so often mentioned as the starting point of the military expeditions."²¹

²⁰ Kitchen, *Reliability*, 258.

²¹ Erman, *Ancient Egypt*, 537.

Moses knew well this place from the time he commanded the Egyptian army in battle against the Ethiopians, hence it was from this place that he organised the Israelites for their journey.²²

Reading the Exodus account which describes the sudden escape of the Israelites from Goshen until they reach the Red Sea, one may think that it is a short period of time as the biblical narrative is given in summary (Exo 12:37-38; 13:17; 14:2). However it is clear from the biblical text that they reached the Sinai desert after a journey of forty-five days.

They departed from Rameses on the fifteenth day of the first month as mentioned in the following texts, "Today, in the month of *Abib*, you are leaving" (Exo 13:4). Then they marched out boldly in full view of all the Egyptians (Num 33:3), and reached Mt. Sinai after forty-five days or on the first day of the third month (Exo. 19:1).

In the Jewish Study Bible (Torah section) there is a footnote which says that 'an Egyptian letter from the period of Pharaoh Seti II (1204-1198 BCE) indicates that the place Succoth (the first stop) was one day's journey from the palace' which was presumably in Rameses.²³

Thus a possible explanation is that the Israelites might have travelled by day and by night for many days until they reached the Red Sea at the beach of Nuweiba, which is possible since they were guided by a column of fire in the evening and protected by a cloud in day light (Exo. 13:21).

Furthermore the Bible calls 'Red Sea' the Gulf of Aqaba (Ex 23:31; Num 21:4; Deut 2:1; Judges 11:16; 1 Kings 9:26. There is only one passage in the Bible referring the Gulf of Suez as the Red Sea (Exo. 10:19).

There are two main problems for the crossing at the Isthmus of Suez:

One is that it would contradict the biblical account of Exodus 14:3, as that location is not 'entangled by mountains'.

²² Josephus, *Antiquities*, 136.

²³ Berlin-Brettler, *Study*, 129.

In the NIV Bible the word used is 'hemmed' which means: trapped, entangled by high obstacles. So when the Bible expresses Pharaoh's thoughts about the way the Israelites are trapped in the wilderness it discards the possibility of they been around the Suez Canal.

The Roman historian Flavius Josephus mentions in his Jewish Antiquities (Book II – Chapter 15),

'They (the Egyptians) 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.'²⁴

Also assuming that the Israelites took the centre route towards the Gulf of Aqaba, one would come to the conclusion that the distance between Goshen and the Red Sea might have taken weeks to be completed. This means that not only the crossing of the Red Sea could not happened in any of the areas around the isthmus of Suez but also that the Israelites had to travel during several days and nights until they reached the second camp in Etham, at the 'edge of the wilderness'.

Etham as a name is unimportant as Todd points out, what counts is that the place is described as being 'at the edge of the wilderness' (Exo. 13:20), which is a geographical description. In archaeology names are not essential as they are susceptible to change as time passes, but geographical descriptions are part of the topography of the land which rarely change with time and can be taken as reference.²⁵

If the Israelites had taken the south route towards the Sinai Peninsula and considering that they could walk an average of thirteen miles per day, they

²⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 149.

²⁵ Todd, *Light*, 85.

would have reached the Sinai in about a week's time, as the distance between Goshen and the South Sinai Peninsula is only one hundred and thirty miles. However this idea would invalidate the Biblical account of forty-five days journey from Egypt to the Sinai.

The second problem is that it would contradict the sequence of events from Goshen to the Mt Sinai.

In Judges 11:16 when the Ammonites blamed the sons of Israel of taking their land when they came out of Egypt, the messengers of Jephthah corrected the Ammonites by saying, 'This is what Jephthah said: "Israel did not take the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites. But when they came out of Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and on to Kadesh.'" This means that if the crossing of the Red Sea had taken place at the Suez Canal the sequence of events would be that, 'they crossed the Red Sea and then they went through the wilderness up to Kadesh', i.e. the crossing of the Red Sea would have been first.

In fact if we take into account the narrative of Numbers 33:8, we conclude that there was a walk through the wilderness before and after the crossing of the Red Sea which fits the possibility of a crossing at the Gulf of Aqaba.

Therefore considering the central route as the shortest one towards Eilat or Ezion Geber, then down to Jethro's land, we assume that Moses was thinking to follow the normal ancient route to the land of Midian (the caravan route to Arabia) around the north of the Gulf of Aqaba, but in the Exodus narrative Yahweh called him saying, 'Command the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea' (Exo. 14:2).

It seems that they stopped the journey on the normal pilgrim route and returned following the Wadi Watir, the way through the ridge of mountains towards the beach of Nuweiba (Fig. 3).

The Watir way is surrounded by steep mountains and once you entered that path you have no way to escape but to end at the Red Sea.

God's purpose to direct his people through the Wadi Watir ending at the Red Sea was to show Pharaoh and all the nations that the Israelites would not face a dead end, but to show his power in protecting his people and that only Yahweh is God.



Fig. 3 – The Wadi Watir ending on the beach of Nuweiba

http://www.arkdiscovery.com/red_sea_crossing.htm

C – The Crossing of the Red Sea

"Lord, was it not You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a pathway for the redeemed to cross over?" (Isaiah 51:10)

Nicholson quotes Noth saying that the 'miracle at the sea' is the culmination of God's act against the Egyptians and consequently it is to be considered the real nucleus of the exodus theme.²⁶

The traditional place of crossing at the Suez Canal shown by most Bible maps is in relation to the *sea of reeds* crossing. This place is no more than three feet deep and it is hard to understand how such shallow waters could engulf an entire Egyptian army.

In 1 Kings 9:26, it is said that King Solomon built ships at the Red Sea near Elath in Edom. This is a very important biblical geographical data. Since this Bible passage calls the Gulf of Aqaba as the Red Sea it is likely that this could have been the actual sea crossing. King Solomon could not have built his ships on the shallow waters of the Suez Canal.²⁷

Another important piece of evidence is in connection with the name of Nuweiba beach, where the Israelites were possibly standing before the crossing. According the local Egyptian people, this beach has been known as 'Nuweiba al Mazayyah' for thousands of years, which means 'the waters of Moses opening'.²⁸

This is a testimony that the local native tradition seems to confirm the Red Sea crossing point.

The interesting fact about this crossing point is that God would not lead the Israelites to an abyss, hard to cross. The underwater landscape from Nuweiba across to the Saudi territory has the shape of a bridge.

The Gulf of Aqaba is around fifteen hundred metres deep but on this land bridge the maximum depth is around three hundred metres, with a path

²⁶ Nicholson, *Exodus*, 16.

²⁷ Ritchie, Mount Sinai (web).

²⁸ Ritchie, Mount Sinai (web).

nine hundred metres wide and thirteen kilometres long forming a gentle six degrees slope (Fig. 4).²⁹

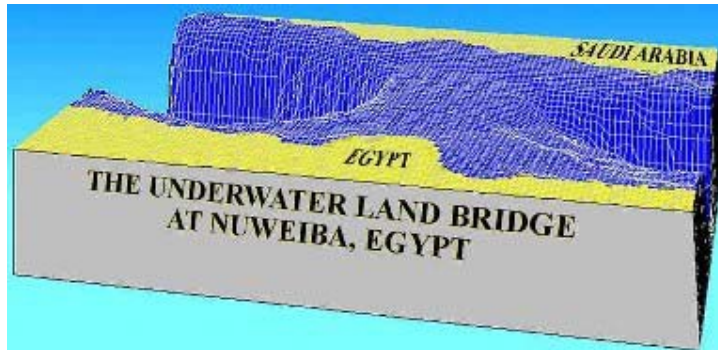


Fig. 4 - Map reproduction of underwater land bridge at Nuweiba
(Ritchie, Steve, www.truegospelofjesus.org)

One could argue how can such an immense amount of water stand still to give way to the Israelites? Even at three hundred metres deep the water would exert a tremendous pressure.

The Bible tells us that the Lord made the waters to freeze at the bottom forming a thick wall of ice to protect the pathway, 'By the blast of your nostrils, the waters piled up; the surging waters stood up like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea (Exo. 15:8)'.

The evidence of the Gulf of Aqaba does not only supports Isaiah 51 (the water of the great deep) but also presents archaeological evidence to support its claim as the crossing point. Thus on both sides of the Red Sea and deep into the waters important archaeological clues have been found.

1. Solomon's columns

²⁹ Gray, Red Sea, (web).

When Ron Wyatt first went to the beach of Nuweiba he found two columns (Fig. 5), on both sides of the sea. These columns are believed to have been placed by King Solomon and are the most startling proof of the exact place of crossing. The massive granite pillars were built by Solomon to commemorate the crossing point and they carry interesting inscriptions.

The pillar on the Egyptian side is still on its original location but the one on the Arabian side has been removed by the Saudi authorities and placed in another location.³⁰



Fig. 5 - Granite pillars built by King Solomon marking the Red Sea crossing site

(Ritchie, Steve, www.truegospelofjesus.org)

If Solomon, the wisest man of his time, believed the Red Sea crossing took place on that spot why should we think otherwise?

³⁰ Gray, Red Sea, (web).

2. Egyptian chariots' wheels

At the bottom of the Red Sea on the sand bridge which is along the crossing point at the Gulf of Aqaba, researchers possibly have found the remains of wheels of the Egyptian chariots (Fig. 6 and 7). They are in the exact line of the two pillars that Solomon erected, laying under the sea.

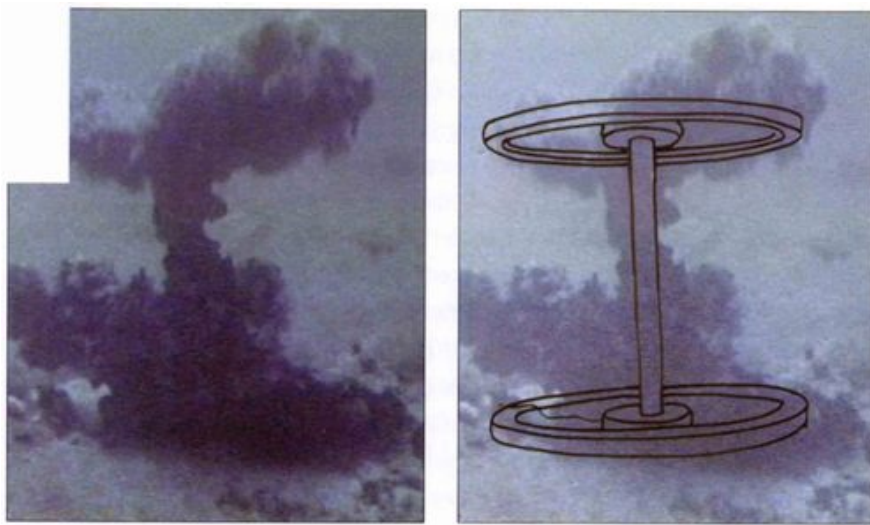


Fig. 6 - Egyptian chariot wheels covered by corals
(Ritchie, Steve, www.truegospelofjesus.org)

Archaeologists who examined these ancient chariot wheels agreed they matched the designs of chariots of the 18th Egyptian dynasty, which corresponds to Moses' lifetime.³¹

³¹ Kovacs, Chariots, (web).



Fig. 7 - Egyptian chariot wheels with exposed metals
(Ritchie, Steve, www.truegospelofjesus.org)

D – From Sinai to the Wilderness of Paran

In Habakkuk and Deuteronomy we find the description of God's triumphant march with his people towards Canaan after the delivery of the Decalogue. Yahweh is covered in glory and rises from Teman, Mt. Seir and Mt. Paran. The message of where God comes from is not clear from the texts as it seems to address multiple locations, but with the aid of the Book of Numbers a better understanding is possible.

1. The text of Habakkuk 3:3-7 says,

God came from Teman,
The Holy One from Mount Paran.
His glory covered the heavens
And his praise filled the earth.
His splendour was like the sunrise;
rays flashed from his hand,
where his power was hidden.
Plague went before him;

Pestilence followed his steps.
He stood, and shook the earth;
He looked, and made the nations tremble.
The ancient mountains crumbled
And the age-old hills collapsed-
But he marches on forever.
I saw the tents of Cushan in distress,
The dwellings of Midian in anguish.

The text of Habakkuk 3 is one of the hardest Old Testament texts to translate in the Hebrew Bible due to the difficulty scholars find to understand every detail of the Masoretic text. The material presented is more connected to cultic matters rather than to prophetic texts.³²

Would this cultic tradition be linked to the worship of Yahweh in the Sinai? That is a possibility.

In this theophany frame, God is portrayed as a warrior who is accompanied by plagues and pestilences, that are about to be thrown on the enemy nations, a passage that like Isaiah 63:1-6 foresees Edom's destruction.³³

Habakkuk's poetic description of God coming from Teman does not offer geographical information about the route followed by the Israelites. We just know that Teman is generally associated with Edom as its capital.³⁴

The references to the dwellings of Cushan and Midian point to the same location where the theophany took place, thus confirming the proximity between Midian and the Sinai region.³⁵

³² Nogalski, *The Book*, 679.

³³ Nogalski, *The Book*, 683.

³⁴ Nogalski, *The Book*, 682.

³⁵ Nogalski, *The Book*, 684.

In his commentary J.J. Roberts says that God's march to Palestine began from the southern mountains, which is confirmed also by Deuteronomy 33.³⁶

Palmer also associates Teman to a south location in Edom by reference to the following texts of Joshua 12:3; Isaiah 43:6 and Zechariah 9:14.³⁷

In the Book of Job, Eliphaz, one of Job's friends, was from the region of Teman, but Paran is a larger region. Robinson describes Paran as a large tract of desert extending from south Judea towards Mt. Sinai which is in the Arabian region.³⁸

2. The text of Deuteronomy 33:2 says,

The Lord came from Sinai,
and dawned over them from Seir;
he shone forth from Mount Paran.
He came with myriads of holy ones
From the south, from his mountain slopes.

A clearer description of the direction taken by the Lord and his people is given on this passage. It describes that the Lord came 'from south, from his mountain slopes'. The excessive use of the Hebrew preposition '*mi*' (from) may confuse the reader's sense of direction as it provides multiple initial points for the trajectory of three days described in Numbers 10:12,33.

³⁶ Roberts, *Commentary*, 151.

³⁷ Robertson, *International*, 222.

³⁸ Robinson, *Habakkuk*, 214.

The variations found in the Deuteronomic passage if compared with the Syriac, Vulgate and the Targum suggests that the text has been badly preserved which gives margins to interpretation.³⁹

A better understanding of the above texts is given in Numbers:

‘Then the Israelites set out from the Desert of Sinai and travelled from place to place until the cloud came to rest in the Desert of Paran’.... ‘So they set out from the mountain of the Lord and travelled for three days. The ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them during those three days to find them a place to rest’. (Num. 10:12, 33)

An idea of beginning and end is given here as the Lord rises from Mount Sinai and rests again on the desert of Paran (possibly where Mount Paran is located) on a journey that lasts three days. The information on v. 12 ‘from place to place’ is probably referring to the two intermediary stops made at Kibroth Hataava and Hazeroth (Num. 33:16-17) until they finally reach the wilderness of Paran, the largest and most barren wilderness faced by the Israelites in their journey to Canaan.⁴⁰

Therefore if Mt Paran is to be considered Mt Sinai it is probably referring to the chain of mountains parallel to the Red Sea from South Edom down to Midian.⁴¹

One important observation to be made is that there is plenty of evidence from the biblical texts showing an intimate connection of Yahweh with Mt Sinai which indicates that from ancient times he was regarded as the God of Sinai. Several old poetic texts (Deut 33.2, 26

³⁹ Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, 335.

⁴⁰ Wenham, *Numbers*, 117.

⁴¹ Cole, *Exodus*, 151.

Jud 5:4-5, Ps 68.8-9m, Hab. 3:3-4) point to and confirm the ancient belief that Yahweh's original home was in the region south of the land of Canaan. These texts mention several places as Sinai, Seir, Paran, the plains of Edom, Teman – but of these the Sinai gives the impression of greatest antiquity.⁴²

Frank Moore Cross argues that in the theophany tradition, Yahweh was the Lord of Sinai (Judges 5:5) and the revelation of Sinai presumes a tradition in which Yahweh's cosmic mount and ancient sanctuary were in the southern mountains.⁴³

It seems that the different designations (Mt Paran, Seir, Edom) are later traditions related to the route the Israelites took when they were led by Yahweh, but the oldest tradition seems to be in connection with Mt. Sinai, a relationship which already existed before the Exodus from Egypt and the emergence of Israel.⁴⁴

The presence of the Israelites at north-western part of Arabia and south of Edom is suggested by the above text of Numbers. It seems they were following a route north towards Canaan after their departure from Mt Sinai at the south of the chain of mountains called Paran.

It is interesting to note that the proposed site of Mt. Sinai in this essay is exactly at south of Edom and in a straight line south of Jerusalem.

In terms of archaeology another important observation to be made is that pottery found in the excavations of Tel el-Kheleifeh, the biblical town of Ezion-Geber (modern Eilat) which is on the route between the Sinai and Kadesh, attest for the existence or a pre-Israelite settlement prior to King Solomon's time and related to the thirteenth-

⁴² Nicholson, *Exodus*, 61-62.

⁴³ Cross, *Canaanite*, 164.

⁴⁴ Nicholson, *Exodus*, 63.

fourteenth century BC – Midian.⁴⁵ That is a conclusive proof of the existence of an ancient Israeli presence in the region.

If the Israelites had been heading north from the Sinai Peninsula it is very unlikely that they would pass through the northwest region of Arabia which is on the route described in the texts of Deuteronomy and Habakkuk.

III - The Sinai Peninsula in Ancient Times

Archaeological discoveries in the traditional site testify to the presence of people in the Sinai Peninsula throughout the ages. Each period of settlement has its special characteristics. It is interesting to note that one of the best understood periods in Sinai is also the most ancient.

Prof Ofer Bar Yosef of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem led an expedition that investigated both the northern and southern parts of Sinai. His expeditions found evidence of a nomadic society in Sinai as early as the Late Paleolithic period (32,000-28,000 BC).⁴⁶

The fourth millennium BC is known to archaeologists as the Chalcolithic period which refers etymologically to the copper utilised by a nomadic people inhabiting north Sinai, the Ghassulians. However in the south, it was not copper that these people were mining but the rich veins of turquoise found in that region.

In the ancient world, turquoise was highly prized and great quantities of the mineral were found in Egyptian tombs which lead us to the conclusion that most of the turquoise was exported to Egypt.

⁴⁵ Sawyer-Clines, *Archaeology*, 76.

⁴⁶ Beit-Arieh, 'Sinai', 32.

The mines were controlled by the Ghassullians until around 2,600 BC when the Egyptians took over it and began to operate the mines. A temple of Hathor, a cow-shaped Egyptian goddess, was found in the Sinai.

Inscriptions found in the temple chambers describe that several mining expeditions were sent by each successive pharaoh ending with Rameses VI (1151-1143).⁴⁷

As mentioned earlier, since the Egyptians controlled the area of south Sinai at the time of the Exodus (around 1450 BC) we conclude that the route taken by Israel could not be towards the Sinai Peninsula as God would not lead his people to a mountain located in a region controlled by the Egyptians.

IV - The Main Places Identified as Mount Sinai

The Jews have lost the location of Mount Sinai, they have no clue where it is. Thus is not possible to pinpoint the exact location of Mount Sinai today on account of such diversity of opinions, but it is possible, as mentioned earlier, to deduct its location based on the biblical records and through a careful analysis of relevant archaeological data.

The following is a description of the most important places described as the Mt. Sinai.

A - Jebel Musa

In the early 1980's a vast exploration activity took place in the Sinai Peninsula, however all this work has contributed almost nothing to the understanding of the Exodus. Besides an extensive excavation (around

⁴⁷ Beit-Arich, *'Fifteen'*, 42.

fourteenth century BC), no remains of the Israelites from the late Bronze Age have been found, except for some archaeological evidence of an Egyptian activity on Sinai's northern coastal strip.⁴⁸

The place has been mainly populated by Bedouins and monks, the latter coming to the region in the fourth and sixth century A.D.

Earliest Christian communities have settled in the region in the fourth century and monasteries' ruins can be found around the Jebel Sufsafeh dated from that time.

In the sixth century the emperor Justinian built the majestic St. Catherine's monastery which has been used as a religious centre since then.⁴⁹

In Larry Williams' book, *The Mountain of Moses*, Bob Cornuke describes Jebel Musa as follows:

We travelled to Mt. Sinai from Goshen in the traditionally accepted route. The first problem I had in believing that could be the mountain was the terrain leading to it. It was very difficult to pass – very thin wadis, sheer cliff areas, and a maze. It is hard to believe that many people could really migrate easily to that area, and also sustain life here. The vegetation was so skimpy. I did not see any sheep near the mountain, nor any shepherds with their flocks for many miles. I saw wild camels in the area, but there were no nomads moving sheep around – at all.

There was an area at the base of the mountain for a small camp but no vegetation or water (...).

I do not see how this site could be the real one. The top of the mountain did not have any dark rocks indicating there was fire of flame there (...).

⁴⁸ Perevolotsky, *Southern*, 28.

⁴⁹ Perevolotsky, *Southern*, 37.

There was no vegetation on the mountain, no trees, no shrubs. I cannot see how anyone, let alone a million people, could survive there (...).
It appears absolutely impossible to get people and livestock into that area (...).⁵⁰

The Sinai survey of the 'Arabah Expedition' conducted in 1967-78 under the direction of B. Rothenberg, covered a considerable area of northern and southern Sinai and recorded more than three hundred sites. Nevertheless, not even a single Midianite sherd was found there, not even in the Egyptian sites of the 19th-20th Dynasties.⁵¹

Since no archaeological remains have been found and the geographical area of the Sinai Peninsula does not favour the biblical account that the Israelites have been there, it takes an incredible amount of faith to believe that this place is the original Mt. Sinai.

B - Har Karkom (The Mountain Saffron)

Har Karkom or the Mountain Saffron, as it is known in English, is located in the Negev region of Israel, four miles away from the border with Egypt.

Emmanuel Anati, an Italian archaeologist came to this mountain in 1955 when he was conducting an archaeological survey in the Negev on behalf of the Israeli Department of Antiquities. The mountain was known as Jebel Ideid.⁵²

Also located in the desert of Paran, the mountain dominates the scenery and is visible from a great distance. It consists of a

⁵⁰ Williams, *Mountain*, 65.

⁵¹ Sawyer-Clines, *Archaeology*, 83.

⁵² Anati, '*Sinai*', 42.

limestone plateau with outcrops of flint and is quite large, measuring over 2.5 miles from north to south, and averaging 1.2 miles from east to west. Its maximum height is 2,795 feet above sea level.⁵³

The site has a great concentration of engraved rocks (around 35,000) mostly from the Chalcolithic period (fourth millennium BC) when considerable activity in the mountain is believed to have happened. But Har Karkom's activity as a religious site ended around 2,000 BC, then there is a gap of almost 1,600 years until the Hellenistic period, according to the findings.⁵⁴

Anati mentions about twelve pillars of stone which he believes represented the twelve tribes of Israel which were erected by Moses at Mt. Sinai.

All the discoveries made by Anati which included cultic rock art dating to the third millennium BC, as well as numerous structures that he contends are altars and temples are all evidence that Har Karkom was a site of consistent religious significance.

1. Review on Har Karkom

Israel Finkelstein, an archaeologist and authority on the Israelite Settlement, says that Anati's claim about Har Karkom should be ignored.

According Finkelstein the evidence of Israel's exodus from Egypt occurred in the early twelfth century BC, but Anati's findings on Har Karkom are dated 1,500 years earlier.

⁵³ Anati, *'Sinai'*, 45.

⁵⁴ Anati, *'Sinai'*, 48.

Finkelstein adds by saying that the Exodus date is supported by the famous Merneptah stele (1,207 BC) which shows reference to the Hebrews.⁵⁵

Besides that, it is unlikely that Mt. Sinai would be located within the land of Israel.

C - Jebel Al-Lawz and Jebel Makla

Jim and Penny Caldwell, an American couple who have spent more hours in the region of Northwest Arabia than any other westerners, believe that Jebel al-Lawz and Jebel Makla are Mt Horeb and Mt Sinai respectively.⁵⁶

Jebel Makla is located at fifteen miles northeast of Al-bad, a town formerly known as the land of Jethro,⁵⁷ Moses' father-in-law and Jebel al-Lawz is at four miles northwest of Makla.

The first main visible characteristic of Jebel al-Lawz is its two massive rocks at the top surrounding an almond tree and a cave right half-way to the top of the mountain which many believe to be Elijah's cave (Fig. 8). Jebel al-Lawz is the only candidate to Mt. Sinai to have a cave in it.

Jebel Makla has a blackened top (Fig. 9) which has been the subject of debate among professors and geographers.

On top of the mountain a great quantity of charred basaltic rock is found.

⁵⁵ Finkelstein, *Raider*, 46.

⁵⁶ Caldwell, *God*.

⁵⁷ Whittaker, *Significance*, 38-39.

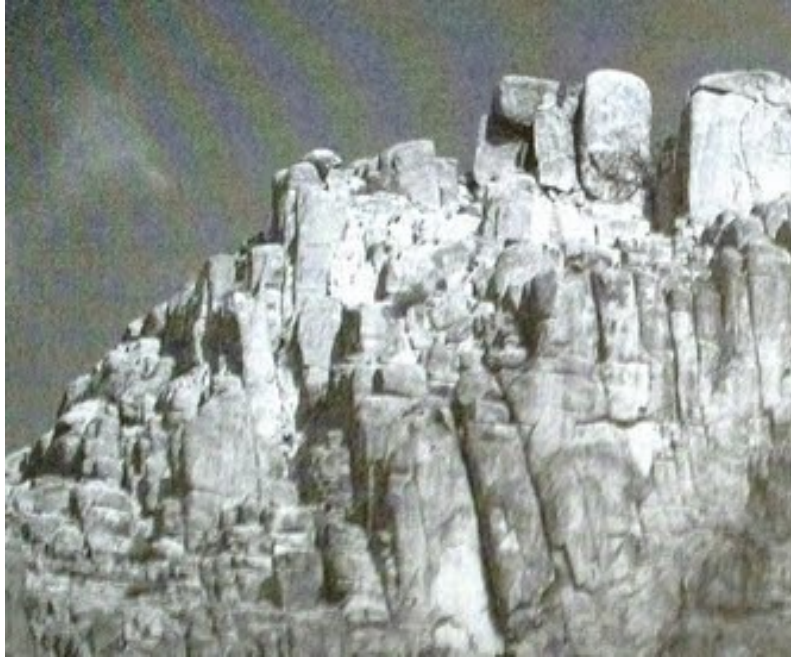


Fig. 8 – Jebel al-Lawz and the cave at the mountain.

(Ritchie, Steve, www.truegospelofjesus.org)

Jebel Makla is the only mountain in the region covered in black on its top and in explaining the reasons why the rocks have been blackened, explorers have debated in two views:

The first is that the dark effect on the rocks was produced by the intense heat due to the presence of Yahweh on top of the mountain, the second explanation is that the half-inch blackened effect was produced by weathering conditions.

Proponents of the first view claim that if this is the real Mt Sinai, it is expected that the presence of God, as described in Exodus 19:16-21, on top of the mountain would have a permanent visible impact on the rocks.⁵⁸

Nevertheless geologist Dr. John Morris, who examined some of the rocks said that there was nothing strange about the metamorphic aspect of the rock, typical for the volcanic area it came from.

⁵⁸ Whittaker, *Significance*, 122.

In another examination of a rock sample brought by Bob Cornuke and conducted by the geologist Nehru E. Cherukupalli says:

'Rock description: a very fine grained greenish looking rock. I 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 crystalline. Amphibole 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.'⁵⁹

The conclusion from Dr. Cherukupalli is that the rock sample was probably of a basaltic nature which by the influence of extreme heat transformed into the greenish black glassy rock outside, but preserved the pinkish colour on the inside, similar to the other rocks at the bottom.

If we consider that the heating effect might have come from volcanic activity why is there no trace of magma on top of the mountain? Is there a natural explanation as to why the rocks on top of Jebel al-Lawz appear black on the outside and on the inside are similar to the other rocks on the surrounding area?

⁵⁹ Whittaker, *Significance*, 124 (notes).



Fig. 9 – Jebel Makla with its blackened top
(Ritchie, Steve, www.truegospelofjesus.org)

If we assume that chemical weathering conditions might have caused this effect on these rocks, as some have argued, why the other rocks on other mountains did not present the same effect?

V - Midian's Geographical Area

Kitchen defends the location for Mt Sinai in the South Peninsula by saying that the poetic constructions on Habakkuk 3:3 do not offer solid basis for putting Mt. Sinai in Midian or Northwest Arabia.⁶⁰ However, a major obstacle that arises in placing Mt Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula is also in regards to Midian.

Due to the amount of archaeological findings (Midianite pottery), there is a common agreement amongst scholars like John Sawyer and David Clines that the land of Midian was located at the northwest of Saudi Arabia or east of the Gulf of Aqaba. Archaeological findings have confirmed that the Midianites once lived in that area.

⁶⁰ Kitchen, *Reliability*, 270.

In fact, extensive ruins were found near the Nabatean burial grounds of Mughā'ir Shu'ayb, next to the village of al-Bad, which many investigators believed to have been a huge Nabatean city (perhaps Jethros' home town).⁶¹

In the Bible we read, 'Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God' (Exo. 3:1).

This passage shows clearly that the Mountain of God was near to Jethro's place (which today corresponds to the town of Al-bad), and that Moses went to the 'far side of the desert and came to Horeb' with Jethro's flocks.

Another indication that the mountain of God was not far from Midian is the fact that within the biblical tradition Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, is believed to have connections with Yahweh and possibly have worshipped Him prior to Moses' and the Israelites' worship.⁶²

In favour of the location of Mt. Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula the authors of the Anchor Bible mentioned that after the discoveries of the Mari documents which revealed that shepherds could travel tens or hundreds of kilometres for pasturing their flocks it would be possible for Moses to pasture Jethro's flocks at the South Peninsula of Egypt.⁶³

However the Bible does not say that, it just says that Moses went to the 'far side of the desert' (Exo. 3:1).

From Midian, in northwest Arabia to the South Peninsula of Sinai, one has to cross at least three deserts and go around the Gulf of Aqaba, travelling hundreds of miles. Besides, the south Peninsula of Egypt is an arid region not suitable for pasturing, whereas the region of Jebel al-Lawz is.

Therefore, it is very unlikely that Mt Sinai would be located in the south Peninsula of Egypt.

⁶¹ Sawyer-Clines, *Archaeology*, 73.

⁶² Sawyer-Clines, *Archaeology*, 166.

⁶³ Freedman, *Dictionary*, 817.

Arabic geographers at the time of the Crusades also attest to the fact that Midian was located in the Arabian Peninsula, east of Gulf of Aqaba on the borders with Syria. This fact is not amazing as some authorities of that period considered the east of Gulf of Aqaba as part of Syria.⁶⁴

VI – Jebel Al- Lawz as the Best Candidate for Sinai

A – The Testimony of Ancient Scholars and Historians

1. Flavius Josephus

Josephus mentions in his *Jewish Antiquities*, Book II, Chapter 11, that when Moses fled from Egypt after killing the Egyptian he came to the land of Midian, a land by the Red Sea, which was named after one of Abraham's son with Keturah (Gen. 25:1).

This land of Midian which sometimes is known as 'Madiane' is firmly identified with the town of Al Bad located at northwest of Saudi Arabia.⁶⁵

He also said in Book II, Chapter 5, that Mt Sinai is the highest of all the mountains that are in that country.

In regards to the traditional place, Josephus knew nothing about the Sinai in the south of the Sinai Peninsula, but he regarded the mountain of God to be located in north-west Arabia.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Davies, *Wilderness*, 52.

⁶⁵ Whittaker, *Significance*, 17.

⁶⁶ Davies, *Wilderness*, 10.

2. Philo of Alexandria

Philo who lived between 20 BC and AD 50 believed that all the events in Moses' life, after he married the Jethro's daughter, took place somewhere in Arabia. His concept of Arabia did not include the Sinai Peninsula rather it referred to the Arabia Felix or Arabia Deserta.⁶⁷

Philo also believed that the three days journey referred to in Exodus 8:27 applies to the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land by the more straight route, which some believed it is possible.⁶⁸

3. Origen

Origen, one of the Church Fathers, received much influence from the old Jewish tradition that Mt Sinai was near the city of Madian in northwest Arabia. In fact he preferred to adopt the old tradition as opposed to accept the Sinai Peninsula as established by Constantine.

Origen defended the idea that Mt Sinai was close to the city of Madyan or Midian, which was the place of the descendents of Midian, one of the sons of Abraham and Keturah and it is said that he fled to the Lord's mountain in Arabia.⁶⁹

4. Jerome

Jerome (AD 347-420) is best known by his translation of the Bible into Latin, the Vulgate, which became the standard text of the Bible for the Catholic Church for many centuries.

⁶⁷ Whittaker, *Significance*, 51.

⁶⁸ Whittaker, *Significance*, 51.

⁶⁹ Whittaker, *Significance*, 54.

In the fourth century, he also made a commentary of the Onomasticon, a sort of directory of names of places (like entries) to which the ancients had no category for.

Jerome made some additions to Eusebius' work, but did not add any contradictory comment.

In regards to the meaning of the word 'Horeb', Jerome said the following,

'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 (Jerome) it seems that the same mountain is called by two names, sometimes Sinai, sometimes Horeb.'⁷⁰

Jerome could have a different view to Eusebius' but he did not, he further added in a footnote to his work, 'Paran is near the Mount Sinai.'⁷¹

B – What Modern Scholars Say About Jebel al-Lawz

1. Frank Moore Cross (1921-2012)

Cross, notable for his work in the interpretation of the Dead Sea Scrolls, suggested that the real Mt. Sinai is not located within the Sinai Peninsula but within the ancient region of Midian, modern northwestern Saudi Arabia and southern Jordan. He believed that Midian played a crucial role in the formation of early Israelite

⁷⁰ Whittaker, *Significance*, 63.

⁷¹ Whittaker, *Significance*, 63.

religion.⁷²

The Bible records that Moses had strong relations with the Midianites for more than forty years and he married the daughter of Jethro, Zipporah. Jethro advised Moses on setting up courts of law (Exo 18:13-27).

Some scholars have even suggested that Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, was originally a patron deity of the Midianites.⁷³

Therefore Jebel al-Lawz being the highest mountain in Midian's surroundings is the best candidate for Mt Sinai.

Cross firmly believed that according scriptural data and the newest findings Jebel Al-Lawz is probably Mt. Sinai.

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

Philby, a British explorer, official and author joined the British Foreign Service in 1917 and was sent on a special mission to Arabia.

He wrote a book about Midian and after extensive journeys to the area he concluded: 'that was the place of the ancient Exodus narrative'.

He comments, 'It is astonishing that my companions (Musil and Burton) all of whom have passed through Al-Bad, had never taken the trouble to visit the scenes of Jethro's activities, celebrated in the Qur'an, let alone the tradition sites connected with Moses.'⁷⁴

Philby was convinced that the region was Midian, the home place of Jethro and even identified the possible well where Moses might have met Jethro's daughters. Nevertheless he never confirmed Jebel al-

⁷² Kerkeslager, Mt. Sinai, (web).

⁷³ Kerkeslager, Mt. Sinai, (web).

⁷⁴ Whittaker, *Significance*, 81.

lawz as Mt. Sinai, rather he identified the sacred mountain fifty km away from the place, even though he could not find a single piece of archaeological evidence.

C – The Testimony of Islam

There is an Islamic tradition that relates the mountain of God with Midian and Moses which dates back to AD 700 when some sources mentioned ascetics, Christian monks, and hermits on the major pilgrim route to northwest Arabia.⁷⁵

From Mohammed's time there is only one quote of the town of Midian when he sent an expedition there under Aayd b. Haritha.⁷⁶

The tradition that associates Mt Sinai with Midian in Islam was passed down by ascetics and ancient Christian monks who visited the place and passed through the route of the Sinai.⁷⁷

In the Qur'an, Allah addresses Moses by saying,

“... And you killed someone, but we saved you from retaliation and tried you with a [severe] trial. And you remained [some] years among the people of Madian. Then you came [here] at the decree time, Oh Moses” (Sura 20:40).

Alois Musil, an austro-hungarian theologian, explorer and writer who travelled extensively throughout the Arab world, collected a huge amount of scientific material. He points out that the name Madian originally belonged to a tribe which inherited its name from Midian, the son of

⁷⁵ Whittaker, *Significance*, 64.

⁷⁶ Whittaker, *Significance*, 64.

⁷⁷ Whittaker, *Significance*, 65.

Abraham, and that 'Su'ejb' is no one other than Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, as he was known by the Muslims.⁷⁸

D - The Pre-Islamic Arabia

It is stated in the history of Arabia that the Jewish influence in the Arabian Peninsula is confirmed at the turn of the first millennium, and that the Peninsula assumed great importance for Judaism especially after AD 70 with the destruction of the temple by the Romans.⁷⁹

Therefore that is some indication that the Arabian Peninsula was somehow considered of religious importance to the Jews as well.

The apostle Paul describes in Galatians,

'But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went to Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus (Gal. 1:13-17 NIV).'

Is not that a strong indication that somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula the mountain of God was to be found? Why Paul who was a Pharisee and defender of the law would spend three years in a pagan territory if it was not to be in solitude and communion with God in a sacred place?

E – The Characteristics of Jebel al-Lawz and other Adjacent Areas

1. The Split Rock

⁷⁸ Whittaker, *Significance*, 65.

⁷⁹ Holt, *Cambridge*, 14.

“Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel (Exo. 17:6 NIV).

The Israelites were travelling from the desert of Zin, from west to the east, towards the Sinai and the scriptures say that they camped at Rephidim which is near Horeb. Now there was no water for the people to drink and the Israelites began to grumble against Moses.

Thus the Lord commands Moses accompanied by the elders to approach a rock and struck it with his staff.

The Bible mentions that streams of water have flown down from the rock at Rephidim at the bottom of Mount Horeb and that God himself was there standing by the rock as Moses stroke it in order to quench the Israelites’ thirst (Exo. 17:6).

A rock which is around fifty to sixty feet tall and is located on the vicinities of Mt. Horeb favours the biblical description (Fig. 10).

This massive rock appears to have been shaped by a heavy flux of water which eroded not only the rock but also the stones at the bottom.

Glen Fritz, a graduate archaeologist and researcher in geography stated that the water must have flowed by a persistent amount of time in order to cause the erosion of the granite substrate at bottom of the elevation.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ *Whittacker, Significance*, 113.



Fig. 10 – The Split Rock - from Jim and Penny Caldwell

http://splitrockresearch.org/content/100/Field_Reports/The_Split_Rock

The fact that only part of the rock and the stones at bottom of the elevation were eroded and not others around the area discard the possibility they were eroded by the action of rain.

2. The Cave

In 1 Kings it is described how Elijah, after he ran away for fear of Jezebel, received strength from the food given by an angel and traveled during forty days and forty nights ending at Mt Horeb. There he found a cave and spent the night (1 Kings 19:1-9).

Then the Lord said: 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by (1 Kings 19:11).'

The expression 'stand on' is very meaningful for it is understood from the passage that the cave was on the mountain of God.

There are caves around all the alleged sites for Mt Sinai, but in none of the sites the cave is on the mountain. Therefore in order to back up the biblical account, the cave has to be on the mountain.

In all other mountains that are candidates for Mt Sinai (Horeb) there are no caves, only at Jebel al-Lawz.

Jebel Musa does not have a cave on the mountain, thus biblically speaking it cannot be seen as the Mt. Sinai.

3. The Golden Calf Altar

“When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him’” (Exo. 32:1 NIV).

In the land of Goshen at the Nile Valley, the cow was one of the sacred gods that the Israelites had seen Egyptians worship many times, so it was a familiar image to them.

The Israelites then asked Aaron to build a golden calf with the gold they had brought from Egypt (Exo 32:1).

The site of the golden calf altar should not be far from the mountain as Moses could hear the Israelites singing around the golden idol.⁸¹

Thus confirming the biblical account, researchers found at the base of Jebel al-Lawz a large altar of stones, measuring thirty feet across and thirty feet tall (Fig. 11).

There were also ancient drawings of bulls on the rocks which resembled the Egyptian bulls (Fig. 12). The drawings had bulls with

⁸¹ Williams, *Mountain*, 104.

horns in a spiralling effect that one quite often sees in the horn of the goddess Apis, or Hathor, at Egyptian inscriptions. This fact was confirmed by a Saudi Arabian archaeologist.⁸²



Fig. 11 – The Golden Calf Altar fenced by the Saudi authority

(<http://www.wyattmuseum.com/mt-sinai.htm>)



Fig. 12 - Petroglyphs on the rocks of the Golden Calf Altar

(<http://www.wyattmuseum.com/mt-sinai.htm>)

⁸² Williams, *Mountain*, 106.

VII - The Bible as a Reliable Historical Source

During the Middle Ages there was a consensus on the subject that the Bible was completely truthful and accurate. It was only with the rise of the Enlightenment period when people begin to examine the Bible as a historical document that they started to doubt its truthfulness and accuracy and began to rely on human reason.

There can be no errors or flaws in the divine inspiration of the scripture and the Bible as God's words is free from mistakes even though sometimes there is an apparent contradiction.⁸³

One of the most important verses in the scripture declaring its divine inspiration and purpose is found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God (God-breathed), and it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction on righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished into all good works".

Therefore no one can deny that the Bible, in terms of Near Eastern archaeology is our largest, and doubtless our most influential surviving literature from the ancient Near East. The Bible and the pursuit of archaeology belong together.⁸⁴

It is interesting to note that the description of the events from Goshen to the Sinai described in the Bible matches with the scenario of the central route, especially from the crossing of the Red Sea to Jebel al-Lawz.

VIII - The Contribution of Archaeology

Even though the Bible and archaeology should be studied together we cannot take the latter to prove the former. In this regard their relationship has been often misunderstood.⁸⁵

⁸³ Oakes, *Contradiction*, (web).

⁸⁴ Shalom, *Archaeology*, viii.

Many attempts have been made across history to uncover evidence of places related to the Bible, but in many cases the discovery revealed to be a deceit or inaccurate according to the biblical data.

In other cases some sites have been visited and worshiped as related to certain biblical events on the basis of popular tradition only, with no archaeological proof to consolidate the alleged claim.

Tradition should not be discarded, but archaeology and the biblical data are more important. They should be consulted and analysed mutually. Therefore the archaeological discoveries are there to illustrate, to explain, supplement and at times even to correct the Bible.⁸⁵

Therefore an alleged site needs to be examined according to the biblical data and archaeological findings whenever the later is available.

Conclusion

Besides the evidences found we cannot be completely certain that Jebel al-Lawz is the actual Mt. Sinai until the Saudi authorities give permission to Western archaeologists to investigate the site.

Nevertheless, taking into account the biblical description, the findings described by many explorers and the characteristics of the mountain we can draw a positive conclusion about its claim.

There are several other archaeological findings not described in this work and probably many more are to be discovered at the Jebel al-Lawz and in the surrounding areas.

Thus, based on the study of the route taken by the Israelites, the archaeological discoveries made and the opinion of scholars and explorers described in this work, we find that there is conclusive evidence that Midian is located in the

⁸⁵ Shalom, *Archaeology*, ix.

⁸⁶ Shalom, *Archaeology*, xi.

northwest region of Saudi Arabia and that Mt. Sinai is biblically described to be in the same area, besides some opposition.

Since Jebel al-Lawz is the highest mountain in that region and it fits the biblical description we can also conclude that it is the best possible candidate for Mt Sinai.

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