

THE EXODUS INSCRIPTIONS AT SERABIT EL-KHADIM

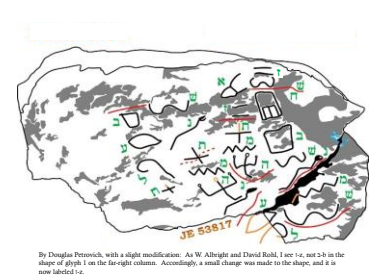
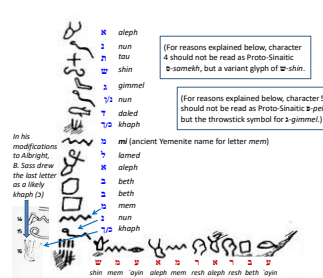
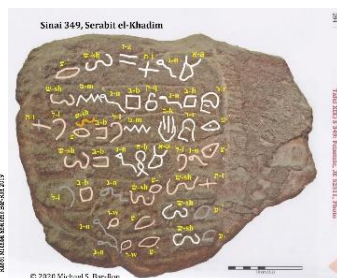
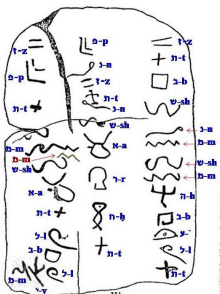
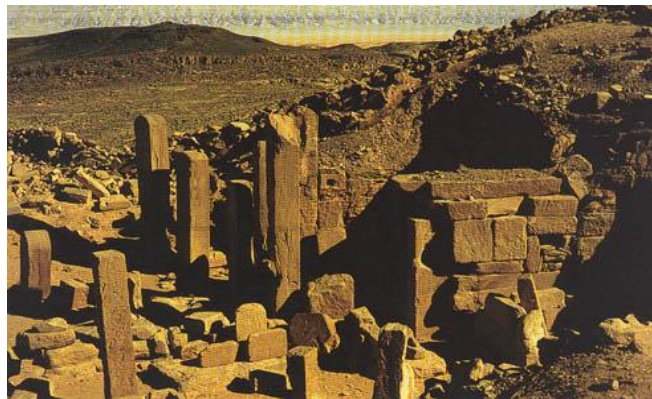
Five Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions provide unprecedented historical context for ancient Israelite traditions of the Exodus

Michael Shelomo Bar-Ron

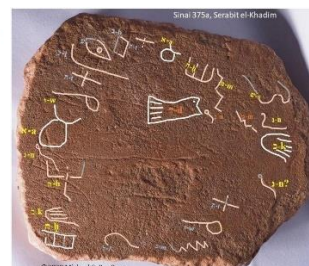
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ABSTRACT: A careful, rigorous approach to Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions found at Serabit el-Khadim – Sinai 353, 349, 357, 361 and 375a – reveals an as-of-yet unidentified genre of P-S inscriptions that voice *polemical outrage* at the cult of *Ba'alat*, (the “Golden Calf”) even harsh judgement of its faithful, with apparent references to specific themes of the Exodus in the biblical narrative. Considering their intuitive reading as pure archaic Hebrew and biblical phrasing, epigraphic clues to their common authorship, and a disciplined system of dating early Semitic inscriptions relative to one another, these inscriptions may provide actual historical context for biblical traditions concerning the Exodus from Egypt.

In order to support the proposed context of the inscriptions, their time period, authorship, and target audience, arguments are proposed for the correct chronological place of the Exodus, a scientific model for the “Ten Plagues”, and proposals for the significance of the P-S inscription Gerster No. 1 and the true location of Mount Sinai.



Column I	Column II	Column III	Column IV
waw	taw	'aleph	resh
lamed	waw	dalet	kaph
'ayin	het	bet	resh
dalet	bet	yod	
W-L-I-D	T-W-I-B-B	A-D-Y	R-K-R
W L 'dt W Hbb 'dyr Kr			



Dedication and Acknowledgements

*Dedicated to my precious family, students and friends around the world
who have loyally remained by my side through the years,
throughout my journey of unrelenting pursuit of truth and wisdom*

*Dedicated with prayers of מְהִירָה וְהַחֲלֵמָה שְׁלֵמָה, רַפּוּאָה, for complete healing and recovery,
to my father-in-law Bensiyon ben Siyon Dighorkar
שְׁלִיט"א שליט"א Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Shlomo Kassin
and to the Samaritan High Priest, Aabed-El ben Asher ben Masliah*

I hereby express **my deep and heartfelt gratitude** to all who contributed to this paper and to my scholarship, culminating in this work. Among them are scholars from very divided camps, with differing philosophies, traditions and approaches to truth. Yet within me they are united and entertained; my work is the child of them all. It is my hope and prayer that the unity their contributions have engendered here can inspire a greater love and unity in the greater world. Truth knows no borders, however our tribe may convince us otherwise. Our need for one another is greater than anyone could realize. I extend my thanks:

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I. INTRODUCTION

With much respect to the giants in the field whose work precedes my own, and with full consideration of their research and ideas, this paper represents a fresh, disciplined approach to P-S (Proto-Sinaitic) inscriptions Sinai 353, 349, 357, 361 and 375a found at Serabit el-Khadim. Unlike other inscriptions that give voice to the worship of Ba`alat (Hathor), these new, reliable readings will reveal that these represent an as-of-yet unidentified genre of P-S inscriptions that voice polemical outrage at the Cult of Ba`alat and even harsh judgement of its faithful.

Although my readings generate much different messages to those Dr. Douglas Petrovich (some of which my colleagues and I find to be far reaching and to involve much unadmitted speculation), this project supports his contention that these inscriptions are written in archaic Hebrew, and seem to make reference to specific elements from the biblical Exodus narrative.

Of course, the academic study of P-S inscriptions has had a century of its own history, complete with other readings. What the field has been missing all of this time, to my understanding, is *cultural context* to guide our thinking. Can any purpose be surmised for their authorship? Are the messages secular? Sacred or worshipful? Do they report, commemorate, praise, or curse?

A Word About Bias

Certainly every scholar comes with his or her biases, which must be highly conscious of, lest we fall into delusion. Sober, critical thinking is the foundation of research. Nonetheless, bias, while we must be wary of it, is not, in itself, necessarily a detriment. In the field of ancient Hebrew epigraphy, it could even be one key element that might enable us to tease out the original spirit and context of an early inscription. Particularly if the bias is related to another major missing element in this field until my entrance: the involvement of a traditional yet open-minded, religious Israeli Torah scholar, fluent in TaNaKh and Jewish oral tradition, besides having a good background in archaeology from his college years, and fluent in Paleo-Hebrew.

After all, with most sincere respect to my colleagues who relate to biblical text from a purely secular perspective, if we *were* reading early Israelite or proto-Israelite writings, who better to catch an idiosyncratic polemical overtone, a subtle biblical nuance or ancient Israelite figure of speech than a modern, rabbinically-trained Israelite scholar, steeped in his sacred literature? One who not only lives and thinks in Hebrew, but is involved with biblical Hebrew as a part of life, and for whom the unbroken chain of Israelite literature is alive, fresh in his mind and mouth as his very breath?

We must employ a healthy degree of skepticism to counteract our biases, but over time, a given bias does stand a chance of being vindicated.

For example, if it is a bias towards Torah apologetics, the ability to generally date to the inscriptions can indicate whether or not their general age is suitable for a proposed biblical context. If common patterns could be found across a number of inscriptions found in a single location of biblical significance, with common themes that would fit, even a common writing style such as rhyme, that would indicate common authorship. Paleographic analysis can even reveal a common hand behind them. Such data can give us clues as to the purpose of the writing.

When we have enough data – multiple inscriptions with multiple points of cross-connections between readings – then Occam’s Razor, the rule of parsimony, can help determine whether the hypothesis has validity. If it does, then all questions of the initial bias that inspired the work become irrelevant.

Indeed, we have established all of the above not for one or two, but for *six* P-S inscriptions discussed here, and more that are not presented here. We have been able to create a relative dating system, revealing the script of *four* of them to be *more evolved* and hence *younger* than writing known to belong to the time of Pharaoh Amenemhat III. (That is when Proto-Sinaitic first appeared, and would only represent the Patriarchal Period – a case for which we bring strong support). On the other hand, the script of these four is clearly *more archaic* and hence *older* than Proto-Canaanite and Paleo-Hebrew inscriptions widely agreed to generally date to the periods of the Judges and Early Monarchy. These represent a *median stage* for this early stage of Semitic script, which is precisely what would be appropriate for an Exodus context.

This approach would not contradict any Exodus context according to other, widely accepted chronological models for the Exodus (which shows how robust it is).

Nonetheless, I support this proposal with evidence that the local mines and temple to Ba’alat/Hathor were still active, and the Egyptian Semites widely literate in the 13th Dynasty. That is a period for which we have a broad case as being most of the “Israelite Period”. When we add to this picture the great significance of Serabit el-Khadim would have held for the Hebrew slaves in the biblical account, and several other key elements, discussed at length, the possibility for an Exodus context is too great to ignore.

In regards to the inscriptions themselves: an analysis of the core script of 353, 349, 357, and 361 (as opposed to additional script added later) suggests a common composer to them all, and that a single hand wrote two or three out of the four. They reveal distinct biblical wording, themes, including an aggressive polemical thrust that would fit an Israelite worldview and distinctly Israelite prophetic flare.

Considering the identification of Serabit el-Khadim with the fifth encampment of the Israelites after crossing the Sea of Reeds, profound evidence for the neighboring Jebel Saniyah and Jebel Ghoriba as Mounts Sinai and Horeb, together with William Shea's reading of Gerster No. 1 (Sinai 376, confirming the long-term presence of the biblical Kenites in the region), *I propose that these four inscriptions could well be the work of the biblical Moses and his immediate entourage.*

They appear to essentially be remnants of the Israelite purge of the cult of the “Golden Calf”, as told in the Exodus narrative. Tokens of the efforts by the journeying Israelites not only to absorb a “mixed multitude” of stranded Hebrew slaves into their midst, but to stamp out their sex cult and reform them to the mores of the patriarchal faith rejuvenated by Moses.

The Order Taken in This Presentation

Following an introduction of the cult of Ba`alat/Hathor as that of the biblical “Golden Calf”, we will begin directly with an exploration of the texts. This will culminate in a speculative interpretation of the dauntingly challenging 375a, which seems to cement our interpretation even further. We will then proceed with how we can date the inscriptions, why the Exodus narrative should be accepted as being based on genuine history – a series of historical events that belong to the 13th Dynasty – and how we can determine who wrote them.

We will conclude with a deeper exploration of the Exodus connections to be made in light of Gerster No. 1, and the possibility that Serabit el-Khadim was the backdrop of Mount Sinai itself. This would strengthen our impression that these inscriptions cannot be divorced from the Levitical purge of the Golden Calf in Exodus chapter 32.

Ba`alat/Hathor and the Golden Calf

A preliminary key to understanding these inscriptions, is (a) that *Ba`alat* (the deity named therein) is plainly the West Semitic name for Hathor, **the golden cow goddess of Egypt**, and (b) its possible identification with the very deity behind the Golden Calf incident. (I must thank David Rohl for this insight and the sources he provided over months of discussion on this issue.) According to either this or an alternate perspective I will present later, the explicit mention of this golden bovine deity in the inscriptions lends provides historical context to the Torah's account. Some background:

Ba`alat, "The Lady", was the chief deity of Canaanite Byblos, and hence popular among pre-Exodus Semites/Hebrews (only a minority of whom were Israelites). According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica: ¹

Very little is known of Baalat, “the Lady [of Byblos],” but, because of the close ties between Byblos and Egypt, she was often represented with a typically Egyptian hairstyle, headdress, and costume, and by the 12th dynasty (1991–1786 BC) **she was equated with the Egyptian goddess Hathor**. [emphasis added]

Serabit el-Khadim, the larger site wherein Mine N is found, is the location of a major temple of Hathor. Frequent mentions of *Ba`alat* were found among its ruins, most notably a small sphinx found by Sir Flinders Petrie, bearing a Proto-Sinaitic dedication ‘to Ba`alat’, a reading confirmed by Sir Alan Gardiner. *This is the same name as that found in our inscription at Mine N*. The link between Ba`alat and Hathor couldn't be stronger.

Ba`alat as the "Golden Calf" Herself

Here is why it is quite likely that Ba`alat was plainly the deity behind the Israelites' sin, which would make the inscriptions analysed below in Section II, Sinai 353, 349 and 361, a strong confirmation of the Torah account:

The principal animal form for Hathor was that of a cow.² She was represented by a golden mask, and bore a symbol of the golden sun between its horns:



Icon of Hathor as a cow, with all her symbols including the sun disk.³



Ancient Egyptian Sheet gold relief mask of the goddess Hathor⁴

Consider how similarly Ba`alat was represented:¹

Under Egyptian influence, Ba'alat is shown on a cylinder seal from Gubla in an Egyptian style—She is seated in a close-fitting dress whose straps cover Her breasts, Her hair dressed Egyptian-style, **bearing the sun-disk and cow-horn headdress of Hathor**, the Egyptian's Goddess of love and beauty. ... In one inscription She is labelled "Beloved of Hathor", and in time Ba'alat was completely assimilated to Hathor by the Egyptians.

When Moses descended Mt. Sinai, he not only encountered the golden bovine deity they'd made, but the Israelites *dancing*. Ex. 32:19:

יט 19 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר קָרַב אֶל הַמִּצְחָה, וַיֵּרָא אֶת הָעֵגֶל וּמַחֲלֹת, וַיַּחַר אַף מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׂלֶךְ מִיָּדוֹ אֶת הַלְּחֹת וַיִּשְׂבֹּר אֹתָם תַּחַת הָהָר.
19 And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and broke them beneath the mount.

This matches what we find in an 18th-dynasty "Hymn to Hathor", translated by John Darnell (emphasis added):⁵

Hymn to Hathor – The Golden One

Come, oh Golden One, who eats of praise,
because the food of **her desire is dancing**,
who shines on the festival at the time of lighting,
who is content with the dancing at night.
'Come! The procession is in the place of inebriation,
that hall of travelling through the marshes.

The phrase 'traveling through the marshes' is, according to Betsy M. Bryan⁶, an ancient Egyptian euphemism for sexual intercourse. Accordingly, the 'hall of travelling through the marshes' is likely to refer to the place of an orgy that took place during this Festival of Drunkenness for Hathor. This is unsurprising, as she was the Egyptians' goddess of love. Consider now Ex. 32:6:⁷

וַיִּשְׂכְּמוּ מִמָּחָרֶת וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת, וַיִּגְשׁוּ
 6 And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt-
 שְׁלָמִים, וַיִּשְׂבּוּ הָעָם לֶאֱכֹל וְשִׁתּוֹ, offerings, and brought peace-offerings; and the people sat
 וַיִּקְמוּ לְצַחֵק. down to eat and to drink, and rose up to make merry.

Genesis 26:8 and 21:9 leave no doubt that the term לְצַחֵק *l'-shaheq* (to "make merry") is a euphemism for sexual relations. What could better explain the outrage of Moses than his descending to find his people engaged in a drunken orgy in the service of the Egyptian love goddess?

However, doesn't the Torah use the term עֵגֶל *eghel* –a male calf– no fewer than six times in the Torah account?

First, it is possible the Torah might not have intended to report the calf's gender, as *matres lectionis* (such as the final ה *heh* that denote a female calf) would not enter the written Hebrew language for many centuries, a point made by Petrovich.⁸ Nonetheless, we do have other sources that can provide that detail:

In the Quran Surah 7:152, the Golden Calf is written الْعِجْلُ, which is pronounced *egelah*, as the Hebrew form for heifer, a female calf. This is testimony to whatever Jewish source from which it comes. Unlike the male form for calves used in the Masoretic text (I Kings ch. 12), the Septuagint and Josephus (Antiquities 8.8.226-228)⁹ speak of Jeroboam installing *heifers* –not male calves– as the "powers" that took Israel out of Egypt:

"It was a man that built the temple: I have also made two golden heifers, dedicated to the same God; and the one of them I have consecrated in the city Bethel, and the other in Dan..."

Strengthening this picture, Hosea ch.10 chastises Samaria and Bet El, mentioning female calves, employing the female form עֵגְלוֹת *egloth*, heifers.

ה לְעֵגְלוֹת בֵּית אֵוֶן יִגְוֹרוּ שָׁכְנֵי
 5 The inhabitants of Samaria shall be in dread for the **heifers** of
 שְׁמֶרוֹן, כִּי אֲבֵל עָלָיו עֲמוֹ, וַיִּמְרְאוּ Beth-aven, for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the
 עָלָיו יִגִּילוּ עַל כְּבוֹדוֹ, כִּי-גָלָה מִמֶּנּוּ. priests thereof shall tremble for it for its glory, because it is
 departed from it.

Finally, there is the point brought in my book "Song of the Creator"¹⁰, that the ritual introduced by Moses of the *Parah Adumah* – the "Red Cow" (an adult female, and therefore a clearer representation of Ba'alat), was plainly a representation of the "Golden Calf" itself:

The unblemished cow that never bore a yoke represents the *'eghel ha-zahav* – the Golden Calf the Israelites made in the desert.

Moshe pulverized the idol, poured its dust into the nearby stream, and made the Israelites drink the water – like the punishment of an adulteress (since the nation had 'committed harlotry' with a false god. [Num. 5:17-27]). When he reduces the cow to ash and mixes the ash in water, the Kohen, a descendent of Aharon (who made the Golden Calf in the first place) imitates Moshe. This is why the cow is *adumah* – earth-red: It reminds us of the waters mixed with earth from the Altar for the suspected adulteress to drink.

When he reduces the cow to ash, Aharon's descendant symbolically reduces our own evil impulses to ash. He mixes the ash with water and sprinkles it, *purifying the impure. The act that recalls the disgrace of Aharon, brings purity for all of Israel.* This is the reason why all priests involved in the process, even the one who merely carries the bucket, become impure in the process: *he 'carries' [bears] the guilt of Aharon, their ancestor. By ceremoniously bearing their ancestor's sin, the priests became the vessel of purification for the whole nation. ...*

One might ask: why would *HaShem* [God] designate the animal whose ashes would bring purity as a *parah adumah* (red cow), as opposed to an *'eghlah adumah* (red calf)? It implies that even in later generations (as the rite of the red heifer is an enduring Commandment for all time), when the nation should have reached maturity, *the same treacherous impulses that existed in the nation in its youth, standing at Sinai, would continue to persist even into much later times.* What was once an *'eghel* (calf) would later become a *parah* (cow). The lessons of the Golden Calf tragedy will remain relevant always.

Fittingly, on the *Shabbath* following the Purim holiday (*Shabbath Parah*), when Jews have the special *Maftir* Torah reading of the passage concerning the *parah adumah* (Numbers 19:1-22); on every non-leap year, it will be the same *Shabbath* that Torah portion *Ki Thissa* (with the account of the Golden Calf) is read. (*M.T. Hilkhoth Tefillah [Laws of Prayer] 13:20*). This is according to *all* customs of the yearly cycle of Torah portions (Yemenite, Sefardic and Ashkenazic). In other words, **the Torah portion with the account of the Golden Calf is, on most years, read when there is an ancient tradition to read the verses concerning the *parah adumah*** (outside of its own Torah portion, *parashath Hukath*, which falls 3-4 months later). It is likely that the ancient Sages were aware of the connection I've revealed.

Not brought in the book is that, in the translation of Numbers 19,2 in the *Tafsir*, the authoritative Arabic translation of the Pentateuch by the 9-10th century Torah giant Sa'adiah Gaon, the color of the "Red Cow" is translated as *safrd'*, a Qur'anic word for saffron – a shade of gold.¹¹ If the *Parah Adumah*, representing the "Golden Calf" were saffron in color, the connection with Egypt's Golden Cow deity cannot be denied.



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II. FOUR “MOSAIC” INSCRIPTIONS AND ONE BY A SLAVE

D. Sinai 353: A Curse-Out of Ba`alat and Warning to Journeying Hebrews Against Her Cult

This P-S (Proto-Sinaitic) inscription, found at the entrance of Mine 11 at Serabit el-Khadim, appears to be pure, archaic Hebrew written by a single author.

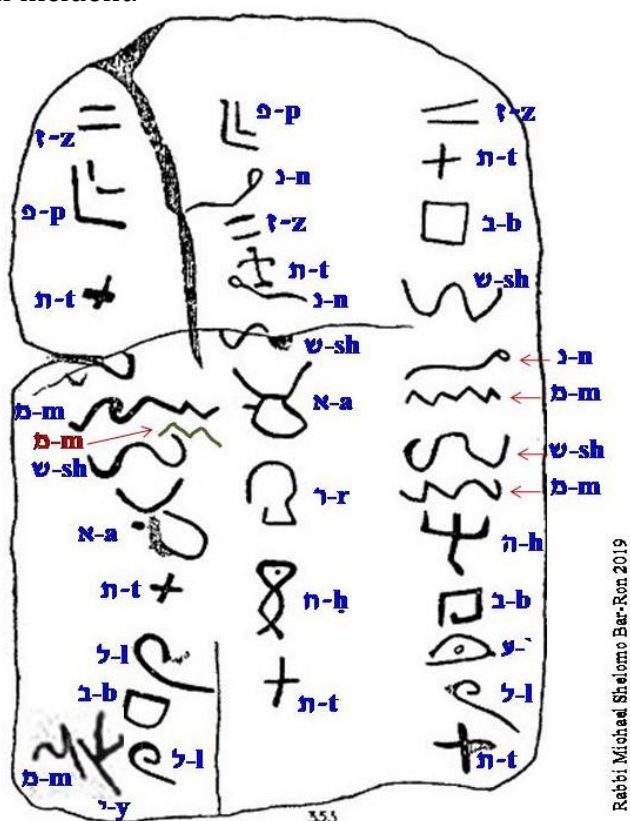
It is the first of four discussed here, including Sinai 349, 357 and 361, all of which seem to have a single composer (not the same scribe). This is on account of their common themes and writing style, providing mutual support for one another. For example, *they all share the same polemical thrust, and contain a rhyme*. They were not, however, written by the same scribe. This inscription joins two others found at Mine L analysed below (Sinai 349 and 357), which clade together based on two additional shared features: all three were found at Mine L, and have a common lettering style, suggesting that the same scribal hand may have written them all.

Sinai 353 shares an additional feature with 357 and 361: it was written in vertical lines.

As in Sinai 349 and 357, the rhyme is found in the final lines.

Sinai 353 appears to be a posted sign warning journeying Hebrew wayfarers not to be seduced by the cult of Ba`alat, the Golden Cow deity Hathor whose temple stood there. It orders them to clear the idol from the locale and remove themselves from its influence.

In the light of the biblical wording and themes here, clues to the age of the writing, the great significance of the location, Sinai 353, like her sister inscriptions here, strongly suggests a real historical basis to Israelite traditions pertaining to the Exodus, particularly the Golden Calf incident.



Base image from *Drawing of Weak Sun text at Serabit el-Khadim mine L* in Butin, Romain F. (1932) *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions*. Harvard Theological Review. Vol. 25 No. 2 pp. 130-203

My respectful differences with Dr. Douglas Petrovich,[♦] who has done work on all the inscriptions brought in this thesis: As we see in the other images at left, there is no letter נ-nun in the left column, beneath the glyph 2.

And at the base of that left column, I am reading the crowded letters (right to left):

ל(l) - י(y) - מ(m).

Reading column by column, left to right, with equivalent English and modern Hebrew characters. *Matres lectionis* (letter-vowels) are added within brackets []:

(left to right) 

left column, top to bottom: **z p t sh m m(h) s e t l(h) b l(y) y*(o)m**

center column, top to bottom: **p(y)n(w) z(o)t (a?)n sh(y) o r h t**

right column, top to bottom: **(1) z(o)t b(u)sh(h) n m(o)sh(u) m h b`l t**

(2) (a)z t b(o)sh n(h) m sh m h b`l t

 (right to left)

left column, top to bottom: **זפת שממה שאת לה בלי יו**

center column, top to bottom: **פינו זאת נשי ארחת**

right column, top to bottom: **(1) זאת בושח נמשו מהבעלת**

(2) אז תבושנה משם הבעלת

* We follow the opinion of William Albright's reading of  as י-yod.

Hebrew sentence division with English translation:

**Pitch, devastation, leprous swelling are hers
with no daylight,**

**זפת, שממה, שאת לה
בלי יום**

**Clear away this [false goddess], O
[female?] travelers**

פינו זאת (א)נשי ארחת

This [false goddess] is shameful!

זאת בושה!

(1) Remove yourselves from Ba`alat!

(1) נמושו מהעבלת!

**(2) Then be ashamed of the [very] name
of Ba`alat.**

(2) אז תבושנה משם הבעלת

Understanding the Inscription and Its Significance

This is apparently a warning sign to females among a group of journeying wayfarers, arriving at the area of the Hathor temple, not to be seduced by the cult of the goddess; i.e. not to fall into the cult as prostitutes. It is vivid, biblical language of curse, warning that she, Ba'alat – her ways – are utterly accursed and shameful. It calls out to these passing travelers *to clear the idol from their midst*, and remove themselves from its influence.

This is an extremely significant find for our proposal that this has an Exodus context:

1. The translation is fairly direct, intuitive, and not forced. The words fit or are close to their oldest, original sense. It cannot be claimed that any of the word usages are late.
2. The word usage, themes and imagery are very Torah-based:

As we see in Isaiah 34:8-9, an area turning to זפת-pitch is the language of biblical curse:

ח 8 For YHWH hath a day of vengeance, a year of recompense
שְׁנַת שְׁלֹמִים, לְרִיב צִיּוֹן. for the controversy of Zion.

ט 9 And the streams thereof **shall be turned into pitch**, and the
וְנָהֲפָכוּ נְחָלֶיהָ לְזָפֶת, וְעָפְרָה
לְנֶפֶת; וְהָיְתָה אֶרְצָהּ, לְזָפֶת
בִּעֹרָה. dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become
burning pitch.

3. The slightly evolved form of the letters indicate that it is from the Exodus era and not from the earlier times of the times of Pharaoh Amenemhat III, as evinced by the Wadi el-Hol inscriptions. The א-aleph (ox) has no mouth. The ה-heh (dancing man) is simpler and more schematic than those in the old, Amenemhat III-era inscription.
4. It truly seems to be written in the very same hand as that which wrote the vertical column of the Sinai 357 and 349 inscriptions, which I attribute to Moses:
Firstly, the letters in common are written *in the same style*: The מ-mem is long, and and-
ש-shin are שדיים-breasts, and ל-lamed is in the same well-defined form.

Secondly, this message, too, is written in columns, and the two final columns rhyme with one another as seen in the vertical column of Sinai 357 and in the final horizontal lines of Sinai 349:

זפת שממה שאת לה בלי יום
פינו זאת אנשי אורחת
זאת בושה, נימושו משם הבעלת

Zefet, Shemamah s'et lah b'li yom
Pinu zot anshei **oraḥat**
Zot busha, nimoshu meha-**Ba'alat**

Moreover, the message is very befitting of Moses' authorship.

5. It fits in as belonging to the journey of the Israelites, as it calls out to נש(י) ארחת -- "women of the caravan" or "journeying women", bringing to mind the Ishmaelite caravan from Gen. 37:25 (the Israelites were accompanied by a great many beasts of burden and livestock). (see below)

This certainly befits the journeying Israelites who encamped there for about a week on their way to Mt. Sinai, or to Israelite workmen who, with their wives, were mining there temporarily while the nation was encamped at Mt. Sinai – as explained in my paper interpreting the Mine N Inscription, Sinai 361.

Apparently, the Israelites made a stop at Serabit el-Khadim (biblical Dofqah), to absorb seasonal Hebrew slaves working the mines. Whereas they should have already returned to Egypt, this group of slaves stayed behind on account of news of the biblical Plagues, explained in Section V. Still attached to the cult of Ba`alat, the Golden Cow-goddess, these Hebrews may have been the ערב רב – the mixed multitude that, per tradition, brought about the “Golden Calf/Heifer” incident in Exodus chapter 32 (Ex. 12:38, 32:7 see Rashi ad loc.).

This is extremely significant as it cements the picture we have put together already. I am calling this one of at least four “Exodus Inscriptions”, and believe it could very well have been inscribed by Moses himself.

If so, it is a significant win for faith, considering how much it looks like the classic “tablets of stone” we imagine for the Ten Commandments. Could they, too, have been written as columns of text?

Understanding the Meaning and Biblical Hebrew Context of Each Word and Phrase

זפת שממ (ה) שאת ל (ה) בל (י) י (ו)ם - Pitch, devastation, leprous swelling are hers

Used plainly as such in Ex. 2: 3 and I Isaiah 34: 9, זפת-*zepheth* not only plainly means pitch or tar. Moreover, in the latter case, it is the language of biblical curse:

- ח 8 For YHWH hath a day of vengeance, a year of recompense
שְׁלוֹמִים לְרִיב צִיּוֹן. for the controversy of Zion.
- ט 9 And the streams thereof shall be **turned into pitch**, and the
וְנִהְפְּכוּ נַחְלֵיהָ לְזָפֶת, וְעָפְרָה
לְגַפְרִית, וְהָיְתָה אֶרֶצָה לְזָפֶת
בֵּעֶרָה. dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become
burning **pitch**.

שממ (ה) - devastation,

Just as it means and is used here, in Ex. 23: 29 we see שִׁמְמָה-*sh 'mamah* meaning desolation or devastation, and being used as the language of curse:

- כט 29 I will not drive them out from before thee in one year,
לֹא אֶגְרֹשֶׁנּוּ מִפְּנֵיךָ בְּשָׁנָה אֶחָת,
כִּי תִהְיֶה הָאֶרֶץ שִׁמְמָה וְרִבְּה עָלֶיךָ
חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה. lest the land become **desolate**, and the beasts of the field
multiply against thee.

שאת ל (ה) - leprous swelling

One of oldest biblical meaning of שֵׂאת-*s'eth*, as used in Leviticus 13: 2, is as a term for a type of leprous swelling. The sufferer diagnosed with such would be decreed טמא-*tamé*, impure, and required to “outside the camp” until the symptoms went away. That Ba`alat is being described with such communicates that she can infect others with a dreaded, communicable disease, and is thus untouchable.

בל (י) י (ו)ם - with no daylight,

Throughout TaNaKh (the Hebrew Bible) darkness is associated with curse; the opposite of goodness and blessing. Examples include Micah 7: 8, Zephaniah 1: 15. In Psalm 35: 6 we see it in the language of curse: may the way of David's enemies may be “dark and slippery”.

Perhaps the clearest parallel to our phrase “with no daylight” – suggesting that the ways of Ba'alat are devoid of blessing and success – is Isaiah 8: 19-20:

יט וְכִי יֹאמְרוּ אֲלֵיכֶם דְּרָשׁוּ אֶל הָאֲבוֹת
וְאֶל-הַיְדְּעָנִים הַמְצַפְצָפִים וְהַמְהַגְּגִים, הֲלוֹא-
עִם אֶל-אֱלֹהֵיו יִדְרֹשׁ, בְּעֵד הַחַיִּים אֶל
הַמֵּתִים. **19** And when they shall say unto you: 'Seek unto the
ghosts and the familiar spirits, that chirp and that
mutter; should not a people seek unto their God? on
behalf of the living unto the dead

כ לְתוֹרָה וּלְתַעֲוִדָּה? אִם-לֹא יֹאמְרוּ בְּדָבָר
הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֵין-לוֹ שָׁחַר. **20** for instruction and for testimony?' – Surely they
will speak according to this word, wherein **there is**
no light. –

פ(י)נ(ו) ז(א)ת - Clear away this [false goddess], O [female?] travelers

Unlike the later meanings of “turn” or “to face”, the earlier sense of the verb פנה-pnh is to clear i.e. of obstacles, as seen in Gen. 24: 31:

לא וַיֹּאמֶר בּוֹא בְרוּךְ יְהוָה, לָמָּה
תַּעֲמֹד בַּחוּץ וְאַנְכִי פָנִיתִי הַבַּיִת,
וּמְקוֹם לְגַמְלִים. **31** And he said: 'Come in, thou blessed of YHWH;
wherefore standest thou without? for I have **cleared** the
house, and made room for the camels.'

א(י)נשי ארחת - O [female?] travelers

Noted above, this is arguably the most significant phrase in this inscription, as it suggests an Exodus context. As seen in Genesis 37:25, ארחת-*orahat* refers to a caravan of people traveling with animals.

כה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לֶאֱכֹל-לֶחֶם וַיִּשְׂאוּ עֵינֵיהֶם
וַיִּרְאוּ, וַהֲנִיחַ אֲרָחַת יִשְׁמַעֲאֵלִים בָּאָה
מִגִּלְעָד, וּגְמָלֵיהֶם נֹשְׂאִים נִכְאֹת וְצָרִי
וְלֹט, הוֹלְכִים, לְהוֹרִיד מִצְרָיִם.
25 And they sat down to eat bread and they lifted up
their eyes and looked, and behold, **a caravan of**
Ishmaelites were coming from Gilead, with their camels
bearing spicery and balm and ladanum, going to carry it
down to Egypt.

This inscription calls out, literally, either to “women [נשי] of the caravan” (that they not turn to Ba'alat-cult prostitution) or “people of the caravan”. The latter would be the case if Hebrew words written in TaNaKh with an initial, hidden *א-aleph* were written without it at this early stage. That would be the case if an initial *א-aleph* is among the *matres lectionis* – letter-vowels that were not written in at this early stage of script's history.

While this is certainly possible (see explanation for ענו לאחינו “Give answer to our brothers” in the analysis of Sinai 349 below), it seems more likely that *א-aleph* was consonantal. Without that initial consonant, we would have נשי ארחת, meaning “women of the caravan”, “female travelers”. Would this suggest a certain degree of literacy among Hebrew women at the time, however limited?

ז(א)ת - ב(ו)ש(ה)ת - This [false goddess] is shameful!

Throughout Scripture, too many sources to mention, בושה-*bushah* means “shame”, “ashamed”, or “for shame”. Revealing a context similar to our own in the inscription, we find in Jeremiah 50:12:

12 Your mother shall be very **ashamed**, she that bore you shall be confounded, behold the last of the nations shall be a wilderness, a dry land and a desert.

Remove yourselves from Ba'alat! - נמ(ו)ש(ו) מהעבלת!

In several places in the Pentateuch we find the verb **מ-*msh***, with its consistent meaning “remove” or “depart”:

Ex. 13:22

22 the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night **departed** not from before the people.

Num. 14:44

44 But they presumed to go up to the top of the mountain, nevertheless the ark of the covenant of YHWH and Moses **departed** not out of the camp.

No clearer an example need be brought as the verse describing, from a Hebrew perspective, why **משה-Moshe** (Moses) was given that name:

Ex. 2:10

10 And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name **Moses**, and said: 'Because **I drew him out** of the water.'

Greatly significant to our contention that all these were written by the same scribe is that this verb is common to three of these four inscriptions: Sinai 353, 349, and 361.

An Alternate Reading

As explained above, there is a possibility that Hebrew words written in TaNaKh with an initial, hidden \aleph -*aleph* were written without it at this early stage. That would be the case if an initial \aleph -*aleph* is among the *matres lectionis* – letter-vowels, vowel sounds not written in at this earliest point of the script. (See explanation for **ענו לאחינו** – “Give answer to our brothers” in the analysis of Sinai 349 below.)

While it seems more likely that \aleph -*aleph* was consonantal, entertaining the possibility of a “hidden \aleph -*aleph*” before ז -*zayin* would yield another profound reading:

ז (א) - Then be ashamed of the [very] name of Ba'alat

According to the Law of Moses, not only are idols accursed, but Israelites are forbidden to mention their very names (see point 4 below).

13 And in all things that I have said unto you take ye heed and **make no mention of the name of other gods, neither, let it be heard out of thy mouth.** (Ex. 23: 13)

The Bible is replete with the shame that idolaters should or will have over their idols: Psalm 97:7, Isaiah 1:29, 42:17, 44:9, 45:16, Jeremiah 10:14, etc. But what is most pronounced is *the shame at the very name "Ba'al"*, as expressed in Hosea 2:18:

יח 18 And it shall be at that day, saith the YHWH,
 תִּקְרָאִי אִישִׁי, וְלֹא-תִקְרָאִי לִי עוֹד that thou shalt call Me *Ishi* [my "man"], and shalt
 בְּעָלִי call Me no more *Ba`ali* [my "master/husband"].

In other words, the very term *ba`al* will be so detestable, due to its association with the cult of Baal, it will no longer be used for a husband, as God is to Israel.

A final example of the shame associated with the name *Ba`al* is in how the sons of King Saul, whose names were *Ish-ba`al* and *Mephi-ba`al*, were renamed *Ish-boshet* and *Mephi-boshet* respectively (II Sam. chapters 2 and 9) -- *boshet* meaning "shame". *Ba`al* was a theophoric element in some Israelite names at the time, as we see with Gideon, also known as Yeru-ba`al in Judges chapters 6-8. And even though he was reportedly given that name to mark his own contempt for Baal, the author of the Book of Samuel was still so ashamed of it, he edited the element out, calling him *Yeru-beshet*. (II Samuel 11:21).



- ◆ Petrovich, Douglas. *The World's Oldest Alphabet: Hebrew as the Language of the Proto-Consonantal Script*. Carta, Jerusalem (2016). 280 pp.

B. Sinai 349: Hebrew Outrage at the 'Disgraceful' Cult of Ba'alat

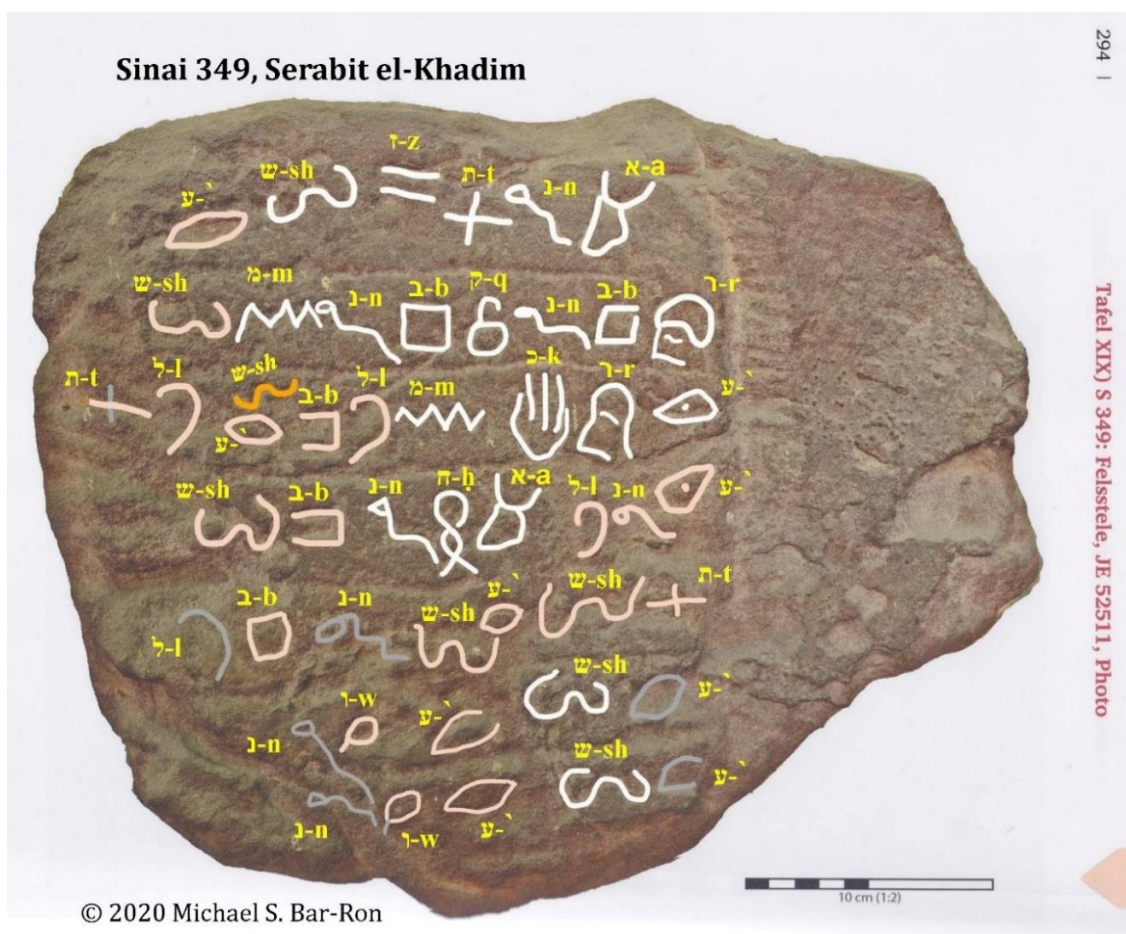
Like the above inscription, Sinai 349, also found at the entrance of Mine L, appears to be pure, archaic Hebrew, composed by a single author. It is the second of the four analysed here that I am calling "Mosaic" (including Sinai 353, 357, and 361), all seeming to have one composer.

This is on account of their common themes – the same polemical thrust – and writing style: they all contain a rhyme. (As in Sinai 353, the rhyme is in the final lines.) In fact, *both 349 and 353 open with a verb in the same form, same tense, in the first person, expressing a divine act – a distinctly Israelite prophetic style.* All providing mutual support for our readings.

Although Sinai 349 is the only one of the four that was written in ruled, horizontal lines, it especially clades together with the two others found at Mine L, Sinai 353 and 357, in that all share the same lettering style. This suggests that *the same hand* wrote all three.

It appears to be a posted sign leveling a polemical challenge at the Hebrew followers of Ba'alat among those who remained at the Sinai mines: in light of the Divine judgement of the "accursed" Pharaoh at Egypt's "Gate", Israelites should "respond" to their "brethren" that they had "committed sin" and "disgrace".

Also here, the biblical wording and themes, clues to the age of the writing, and the identification of the site with the fifth encampment of the Israelites (after crossing the Sea of Reeds) en route to Mt. Sinai, all suggest an Israelite Exodus context. Like 353 above, Sinai 349 may bring life to the purge of the "Golden Calf" cult by Moses.



Note: The letters in white are agreed upon by nearly all scholars. Those in beige are those that are readable to me, but are somewhat unclear or disputed. Letters in grey are speculative. After copious time spent scrutinizing the image of 353 with the highest resolution, considering scribal patterns that make sense linguistically, it seems that the letters in grey are present, but that is contestable. *These speculative elements do not affect the main theme of the inscription, which are found in lines 1-4, all quite readable.*

The rows of text with equivalent English and modern Hebrew characters. *Matres lectionis* (letter-vowels) are added within brackets []:

(left to right, opposite the order on the stone) 

a n t z sh `

r b n q b n m sh


` r k m l b ` l t

` n[w] l a ḥ n[w] b sh

t sh ` sh[w] n b l[h]

` sh[w] ` w n

` sh[w] ` w n

(right to left, as on the stone) 

אנתז שע

ר בן קב נמש

ערך מלבעלת

ענ לאחינ בש

ת שעש נבל[ה]

עש[ו] עון

עש[ו] עון

Hebrew sentence division with English translation:

Lo I cut down the gate of the Accursed One [male]!

Gone is the value of those for [belonging to] Ba`alat.

Give answer to our brothers – ‘For shame’

that they have committed disgrace,

they have committed sin!

They have committed sin!

אנתז שער בן קב!

נמש ערך מלבעלת.

ענו לאחינו – ‘בשת’

שעשו נבלה,

עשו עון!

עשו עון!

Understanding the Inscription and Its Significance

This inscription bears the same structure as we find in Sinai 357 and 361, analysed below: there is an opening, noting a great Divine act, followed by a challenge to faithlessness. And if the letters נ-n at the ends of the final two lines are truly there as I believe, then final two lines rhyme, as we see in Sinai 353 and 357:

אנתז שער בן קב!
נמש ערך מלבעלת.
ענו לאחינו ‘בשת’
שעשו נבלה
עשו עון
עשו עון

Entaz sha`ar ben qav!
Nimash `erekh mi-leba`alat
`Enu l`aḥinu ‘boshet’
She`asu nevelah
`Asu `awon
`Asu `awon

These interconnections are compelling evidence for common authorship, and for the same reasons given above for Sinai 353, the message is very befitting of Moses' authorship:

It is one of prophet-like rebuke: the opening words are in the Divine first person, telling how YHWH's **cut down of the Gate of Egypt** ("the Accursed One", a male figure, is the fallen Pharaoh). The "Gate" is likely the site of the *Yam Suph* crossing, where the Egyptian chariot force was drowned. Following this epic event, Hebrew loyalty had pivoted to the traditional Deity of their patriarchs (who was recognized as the Author of their redemption), as the Exodus narrative recounts (see Ex. 14:31).

Now in hopes of absorbing them into the Israelite nation en route to their Promised Land, this was meant to impress the Hebrew slaves at Serabit el-Khadim. These were a large group of **brother Hebrews**, seasonal workers who had remained behind at the Sinai mines. On account of the Plagues, they were unable to return, as they normally would have, following the cooler months of winter. These likely included anthrax;² bubonic plague according to another opinion, news of which would have kept them from returning. (*For more on this historical model for the Exodus to which we subscribe, see Section III-C.*)

As mentioned above, this group is likely the ערב־רב *erev rav* – the "mixed multitude" that accompanied the Israelites on their journey, many of whom were charged and executed in the "Golden Calf" incident (Ex. 12:38, 32:7 see Rashi ad loc.).

To culturally assimilate them as **valued brethren**, there, in the shadow of their Temple of Ba'alat ("the Lady", the Golden Cow deity), the stranded Sinai Hebrews were being rebuked and warned: in this new reality, stragglers still loyal to Ba'alat **had no value** for the new-born nation.³ Their attachment to the cult of Ba'alat was **a disgrace; sin** that would not be tolerated.

In short summary, Sinai 353 is a polemical challenge to those left isolated at the mines: in light of what God had wrought in Egypt, bringing judgment on the "accursed" Pharaoh, they must now realize that had committed sin and disgrace by following the fertility cult of Ba'alat. The practices of the cult were sordid in the eyes of their patriarchal cult (Deut. chapter 4, especially verses 3-5, Judges 2:11, 3:7, 8:33, 10:6, 10:10) that had regained strength. Those who had left Egypt are being rallied to rebuke their brethren, to shame them in order to repatriate them to the revived, patriarchal faith.

Understanding the Meaning and Biblical Hebrew Context of Each Word and Phrase

אנתו שער - Lo I cut down

This phrasing requires some explanation to convince the reader less familiar with biblical Hebrew:

First, the first dictionary definition of the verb נתו-ntz is "הזה, זרק למרחק" – "lop off or throw a distance". The second is "כרת וקצץ, חתך בתנופה" – "chop, trim, cut with a swift movement". It is represented in Isaiah 18: 5:

ה כי לפני קציר כְּתֵם פָּרַח וּבִסֵּר 5 For before the harvest, when the blossom is over, and the
גִּמְלַל יִהְיֶה נָצֶה, וְכָרַת הַזְּלָזִלִּים bud becometh a ripening grape, He will cut off the sprigs
בְּמִזְמֵרוֹת וְאֶת הַנְּטִישוֹת הִסִּיר with pruning-hooks, and the shoots will He take away and
הִתָּן. **lop off.**

Similar verbs of destruction are found in Jeremiah 1:10:

י רָאֵה הִפְקֹדֶתִיךָ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה עַל הַגּוֹיִם וְעַל 10 See, I have this day set thee over the nations and
הַמְּמַלְכוֹת, לְנִתּוֹשׁ וְלִנְתּוֹץ וְלִהְרֹס, לְבָנוֹת over the kingdoms, **to root out** and to pull down,
וְלִנְטוֹעַ. and to destroy and to overthrow; to build, and to
plant.

It is conjugated such that it is referring to a past or ongoing act of destruction – I am suggesting by God, most likely in the present perfect.

In scattered places in TaNaKh (such as in II Kings 12:14-18 and Ezra 1:5, Psalms 18:38-41, and Daniel 12:8), especially in songs, there are examples of verbs in a future form speaking about the past. In the Song of the Sea, we find: Ex. 15:1 (יָשִׁיר-yashir), 15:5 (יִכְסִימוּ-yekhasyumu), 15:7 (תַּהְרֹס-taharos, תִּשְׁלַח-t'shallah), 15:12 (תִּבְלַעְמוּ-tivla'emo), 15:14 (יִרְגָּזוּ-yirgazun), and in the Song of Deborah: Judges 5:6 (יִלְכּוּ-yel'khu), 5:8 (יִבְחַר-yivhar), 5:13 (יֵרַד-yerad (x2), 5:17 (יֹאגֹר-yagur), 5:21 (תִּדְרֹכִי-tidrekhi), 5:26 (תִּשְׁלַחְנָה-tishlahnah). All these future-tense verbs describe past actions.

Significantly, we find a few examples in Job where this "future-past" form is employed in the first-person singular, as in our reading here of אֶנְתַּז-Entaz. Job is known to rabbinical tradition as one of the very oldest books of the TaNaKh, and therefore an important source to learn how verbs were conjugated closer to the time of the Exodus. In 31:13 we find:

יג אם אֶמְאָס מִשְׁפֹּט עַבְדִּי 13 If I **did despise** the cause of my man-servant, or of my maid-
וְאֶמְתִּי בְּרִבָּם עִמָּדִי. servant, when they contended with me.

In Job 32:11-12:

יא הֵן הוֹחַלְתִּי לְדְבָרֵיכֶם אֲזִין 11 Behold, I waited for your words, **I listened** for your reasons,
עַד תִּבְוִינֶתִיכֶם עַד תִּחְקְרוּן whilst ye searched out what to say.
מִלִּין.

יב וְעַדִּיכֶם אֶתְבּוֹנֶן וְהִנֵּה אִין 12 Yea **I attended [paid close attention]** unto you and considered
לְאִיּוֹב מוֹכִיחַ עוֹנָה אֶמְרִיו and behold, there was none that convinced Job, or that answered
מִכֶּם. his words among you.

Other examples are found in Psalms, such as in 18:38-41, and Daniel 12:8:

ח וְאֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי וְלֹא אָבִין, וְאֶמְרָה 8 And I heard but **I understood** not, then said I: 'O my lord,
'אֲדִנִּי מָה אַחֲרִית אֵלֶּה.' what shall be the latter end of these things?'

The use of this archaic "past-future" verb form which is employed both in Job and in the Song of the Sea is significant to our proposal that this has an Exodus context: the Song of the Sea was reportedly sung *only weeks prior* to the Israelites' encampment in **Dofqah**. As will be explored later, the original, Egyptian name of Serabit el-Khadim (its Arabic name) was **Du Mofkat** (Mountain of Turquoise); most likely the source of the Hebrew name in the Torah. In other words, this unique phrasing in the inscription and Sinai 357, analysed further on, fits the same in that biblical song.

Those fluent in Hebrew may be bothered that the *n-nun* does not fall in the future tense of this *פ-נ* verb as it should. According to the rules of Hebrew grammar, it should read *אֶתְשׁ-Entosh*. However, there are several examples of how this rule was not firmly in place in early biblical times, including Numbers 14:3:

ג וְלָמָּה יְהוָה מְבִיא אֹתָנוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ
הַזֹּאת לְנָפֹל בַּחֶרֶב? נָשִׁינוּ וְטַפֵּנוּ יִהְיוּ
לְבָז; הֲלוֹא טוֹב לָנוּ שׁוּב מִצְרָיִמָּה? 3 And wherefore doth YHWH bring us unto this land, **to**
fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will be a
prey; were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

Note how the *n-nun* remains, not becoming *לפול*. Other examples include Isaiah 58:3 (תִּינְגוּסוּ-tingosu), Psalms 68:3 (תִּינְדוּף-tindof), Zechariah 1:16 (יִינְנָטָה-yinnateh), Jeremiah 6:4 (יִינְנָטוּ-yinnatu), and Isaiah 51:16 (לִינְטוֹ-lintoa'). In this historical context, the usage of *אנתש-Entosh* is perfectly acceptable.

That both Sinai 349 and Sinai 357, analysed below, both open with a verb in this form, in this tense, in first person, expressing a divine act, strengthens my proposal that they were composed by the same author, writing in a distinctly Israelite prophetic style.

שער בן קב - The gate of the Accursed One [male]

sha'ar plainly means “gate” throughout Scripture (i.e., Deut. 5: 13, 6: 9), generally referring to city gates (i.e. Gen. 19: 1, Judges 16: 3). Significant to my interpretation, it is commonly used in reference to cities that face destruction by Divine Justice, as we see in Gen. 19: 1 and 22: 17. In the latter, we see that possessing the gate of one’s enemy is an expression of conquest. Gen. 22: 17:

יז כִּי בָרַךְ אֲבְרָהָם וַהֲרַבָּה אֲרָבָה
אֶת זֶרְעוֹ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחוֹל
אֲשֶׁר עַל שְׂפַת הַיָּם, וַיֵּרֶשׁ זֶרְעוֹ אֶת
שַׁעַר אֹיְבָיו. 17 that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will
multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand
which is upon the seashore; and thy seed **shall possess the**
gate of his enemies.

qab means curse. Accordingly, *בן קב-ben qab*, is an “accursed one”. This is equivalent to *בן מוות-ben mowwet* (II Samuel 12: 5 – one fitting to be killed, lit. “son of death” – or a *בן בַּת-ben belia'al* (Sam. 26: 17, 1: 16) – a wicked or corrupt person, literally a “son/daughter of wickedness”).

נמש ערך מלבעלת - Gone is the value of those for [belonging to] Ba'alat

As explained at length above in the analysis of Sinai 353, the verb *מש-msh*, with its consistent meaning “remove” or “depart”, is found in several places in the Pentateuch, such as Ex. 2:10, 13:22, and Num. 14:44.

Greatly significant to our contention that all these were written by the same scribe is that this verb is common to three of these four inscriptions: Sinai 353, 349, and 361.

ענה (ו) לאח(י)נן - Give answer to our brothers,

The translation here is straightforward. The verb *ענה-'anah* – answer, respond – is usually involves the preposition *את-et*, or even the prefix *ב-b*, but the prefix *ל-l* is also found, as seen in Num. 21: 17:

יז אַז יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁרָאֵל אֶת-הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת, עָלֵי
בָּאֵר, עֲנֵנוּ-לָהּ 17 Then sang Israel this song: ‘Spring up, O well –
give answer unto it

Psalms 147: 7

ז עֲנֵנוּ לַיהוָה בְּתוֹדָה, זָמְרוּ
לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּכִנּוֹר 7 **Answer unto** YHWH with thanksgiving, sing praises upon
the harp unto our God

The closest parallels to “answering brothers” are found in Deut. 19: 18 and Gen. 45: 4:

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אֶחָיו 'גִּשּׁוּ-נָא אֵלַי' 4 And Joseph said unto his brethren: 'Come near to me, וַיִּגְשׁוּ, וַיֹּאמֶר 'אֲנִי יוֹסֵף אֲחֵיכֶם, אֲשֶׁר- I pray you.' And they came near. And he said: 'I am מִכְרָתֶם אֹתִי, מִצְרַיִמָּה' Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

This example is quite significant, as it suggests that the preposition אל-el is a later, fuller spelling. This opens up the possibility of an initial א-aleph in biblical Hebrew words a *matre lectionis*; a letter vowel – not a consonant. As mentioned in the analysis of Sinai 353, this opens up a second possible reading there.

בשת - 'For shame'

This is plainly a term for “shame” (see I Samuel 20: 30), coming from Judean-Aramaic term בַּשְׁתָּ (*bastu*),⁴

ל וַיַּחַר אֵף שָׁאוּל בִּיהוֹנָתָן וַיֹּאמֶר 30 Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and לו', בֶּן נַעֲוֹת הַמְרִדוֹת, הֲלוֹא יָדַעְתִּי he said unto him: 'Thou son of perverse rebellion, do not כִּי בָחַר אֶתְּהָ לָּבֹן יִשְׂי לְבַשְׁתָּהּ וּלְבַשְׁתָּ I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own עֲרוֹת אִמִּי? shame, and unto the shame of thy mother's nakedness?'

It was also a pejorative term for *Ba'al*, found in the books of Samuel (see II Sam. 11: 21 cf. Judges 6: 32).

שעש [ח] נבל [ה] - That they have committed disgrace

עש [ח] עון - They have committed sin

Hebrew Scripture is replete with the rebuke by prophets against the committing sins and for disgraceful behavior. Several terms are used, such as: כלה-*kalah* – destruction (Gen. 18:21), חטא-*het* – transgression (Num. 5:7), עיל-*awel* – corruption (Lev. 19:15), הרע-*hara'* – evil (Judges 2:11 and elsewhere) and עון-*awon* – sin (Num. 5:7).

The phrase “committing disgrace” with the term נבלה-*nevalah* – disgrace, outrage, abomination – is found in Deut 32:6

ו ה' לִיהוָה, תִּגְמְלוּ-זֹאת, עַם נָבֵל וְלֹא 6 Do ye thus requite YHWH, O disgraceful people and ... חָכָם? ... unwise? ...

Deut. 22:21:

כֹּא וְהוֹצִיאוּ אֶת הַנַּעֲרָה אֶל פֶּתַח בֵּית 21 then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her אָבִיהָ וְסָקְלוּהָ אֲנָשֵׁי עִירָה בְּאֲבָנִים father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with וּמָתָה כִּי עָשְׂתָה נְבִלָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לְזִנוֹת she hath wrought disgrace in Israel, to play the harlot in her father's house; so shalt thou בֵּית אָבִיהָ; וַיִּבְעֲרָהּ הָרָע מִקֶּרְבָּךְ. put away the evil from the midst of thee.

Significantly, it is also found in the Book of Job 42: 8, widely considered to be among the oldest of biblical texts.



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C. Sinai 357: A Call for Faith in Regards to Manna in Light of Uprooted Egyptian Oppression

Here we have two P-S inscriptions – a vertical and a horizontal line. These, too, appear to be pure, archaic Hebrew – the *vertical line* being clearly composed by the same, single author as the others.

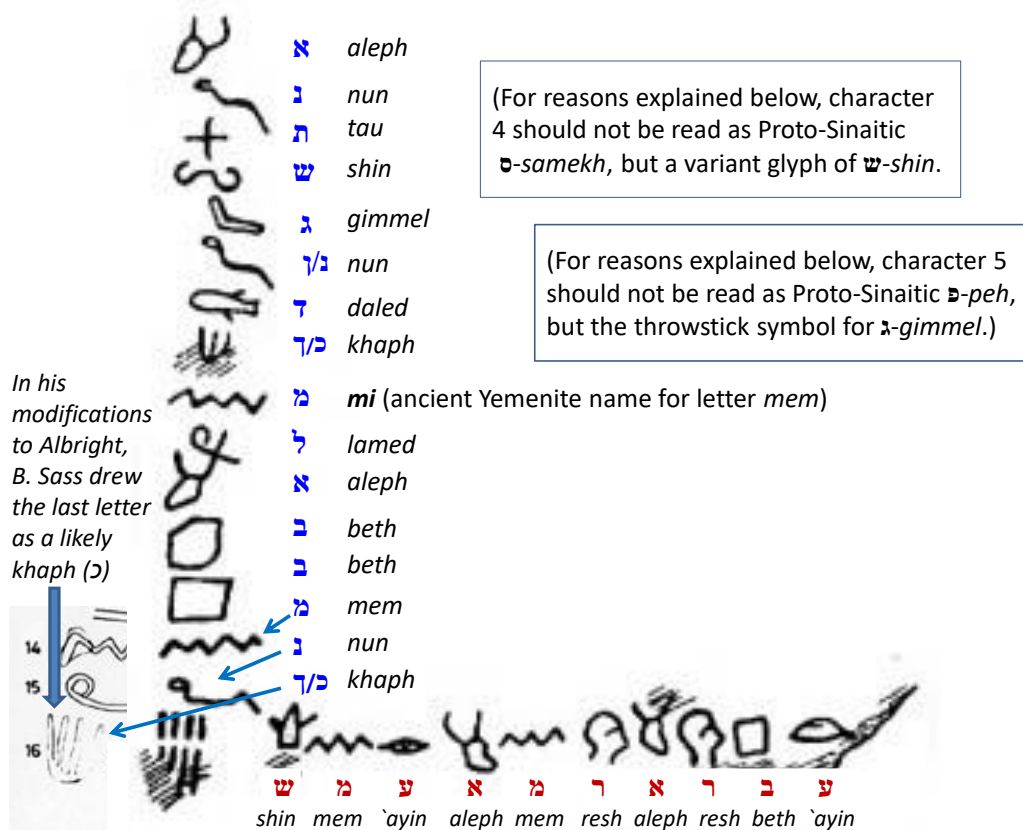
It is a third set of the four sister tablet inscriptions I am calling “Mosaic” – including Sinai 353 and 349 above and 361 below – all bearing the signs of a single composer. Again, this includes common themes and writing style (the same polemics, all containing a rhyme), providing mutual support for these readings. In fact, as noted above, *both Sinai 357 and 349 open with a verb in the same form, same tense, in the first person, expressing a divine act – a distinctly Israelite prophetic style.*

While it clades together with 353 and 361 in that all three were written in vertical lines, Sinai 357 clades tightly with the two others found Mine L, 353 and 349, on account of their having the same lettering style, suggesting that all three may have inscribed by *the same scribal hand.*

The reasoning behind the letter identifications employed vis-à-vis other opinions is treated at length.

The vertical line reads as a sign to inspire visitors to behave appropriately in regards to *manna*, in light of the "uprooting" of an "oppressed Garden". While this most likely refers to the uprooted Egypt, the possibility that it refers to the hoped-for conquest of Canaan from an Israelite perspective is also explored. The simpler reading of the lower, horizontal inscription is consistent with a short approbation by a respected person with his signature, a warning to "hearken" to the vertical message.

Also here, the wording and themes, clues to the age of the writing, and significance of the location, all suggest an Israelite Exodus context. In fact, Sinai 357 seems to refer to the Exodus itself and the manna-bread mentioned in the Pentateuch (explained below).



Reading the column, followed by the horizontal line, with equivalent English and modern Hebrew characters. *Matres lectionis* (letter-vowels) are added within brackets []:

(left to right) 

vertical line, top to bottom: **a n tsh g a n d a k m(y) l a b b m n k**

horizontal, bottom line: **sh m` a m r a r b`**

 (right to left)

vertical line, top to bottom: **א n t ש ג n ד k מ [י] l a b b m n k**

horizontal, bottom line: **ש m ע a m r a r b ע**

Hebrew sentence division with English translation:

"Lo I root out an oppressed [or "lowly"] garden!

אנתש גן דך!

Who is for the Father in regards to

מי לאב במנך?

[i.e. relating to and behaving properly with]
your manna?!"

שמע! אמר ארבע.

– **"Hearken [to this], says Arba`."**

Understanding the Inscription and Its Significance

After all is considered, the inscription appears to be a rallying cry to inspire the Hebrews to relate properly to the manna – their primary source of nourishment. This is done by reminding them of the great feat God had done, rooting out the oppressive regime from the oppressed Garden-land from whence they came (or had uprooted them from it). This was a great feat by "the Father" (אב-Av) and a reason for the Israelites to feel gratitude, awe and fear. It is clear reasoning as to why one should act in a God-centered manner (not selfishly) in regards to manna.

א n t ש * ג n * ד k * מ (י) * l a b * b m n k

Lo I root out an oppressed (or "lowly") Garden!

Who is for the Father in regards to

[i.e. relating to and behaving properly with] **your manna?!**

ALTERNATIVE READING: "I SHALL ROOT OUT"

It is entirely possible that this verb was intended to be read in the simple future, and as such, expresses hope and intention of a future conquest. The "oppressed Garden" would be the land of Canaan, so the impetus to relate properly to their food resource would be a reminder of their mission to liberate the Israelites' Promised Land.

Accordingly, the vertical inscription begins as a first-person statement by a powerful, charismatic individual. This could either be someone trying to set an example, i.e. "as for

me and my house, we will serve YHWH" (Joshua 24:15) or speaking in God's Name. In either case, this would be consistent with an authorship by one of the military leaders of the Israelites, especially Moses, Hur, or Joshua.

According to this logic, the military leader would have been speaking of Canaan as a "garden" in order to attract the people to the Promised Land, which Moses called "a good and spacious land" (Ex. 3:8) and "flowing with milk and honey" (*Ibid.* and 14 other places) it is being referred to here as a "garden". It would also communicate the message that Canaan is no less blessed than Egypt from whence they came. After all, a גן-gan (Garden) is a place of delight. In an Exodus context, only a few encampments into the journey, an Israelite leader may not have preferred to mention Egypt in such an idyllic way, lest the people be drawn to return to Egypt (a serious problem the leadership was already contending with before they arrived in Dofqah).

The term דַּךְ-*dakh* (oppressed, lowly) is used in Psalms 9:10 to refer to the lowly servant of God, so the term is not pejorative. Canaan being described thus would fit into the context of how the Promised Land is anthropomorphized in the Torah: "then the Land shall enjoy its Sabbaths" (Lev. 26:34), "lest the Land vomit you out..." (18:28), "So ye shall not pollute the land... thou shalt not defile the land..." (Num. 35:33-34).

From the Israelite perspective, Canaan, their Promised Land, was indeed "oppressed" at the time: It was being "polluted" and "defiled" by powerful foes, "a people great and tall" who had built "fortified cities to the sky" (Deut. 9:1-2); those who had fully taken the land over during the Sojourn in Egypt, and now dominated it with powerful armies:

כֹּה כָּל-הַתּוֹעֲבוֹת הָאֵלֶּה, עָשׂוּ אֲנָשֵׁי-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵיכֶם; וַתִּטְמָא, הָאָרֶץ. 27 for all these abominations have the men of the land done, that were before you, and **the land is defiled.** (Lev. 18: 27)

Here is a grammatical reason why such a reading might be preferred:

While examples of the above-mentioned "future-past" form are found, it is far less common than the simple future tense speaking of the future, and the past being conjugated in the simple past form, and the unique biblical past tense formed by when a future tense verb is preceded by *v-waw* that flips it to the past.

Even in biblical songs, future statements in the first-person singular are always in the future tense, with no exceptions that could be found:

אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה... 1 ..."**I will sing** unto YHWH..."
 ב...זֶה אֱלֹהֵי וְאֵנָּהוּ, אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי וְאֶרְמְמָנָהוּ. 2 ... this is my God, and **I will glorify** Him; my father's God, and **I will exalt** Him."
 ט אָמַר אוֹיֵב אֶרְדֹּף אֲשִׁינָּה, אַחֲלֶק שָׁלָל; תִּמְלֹאמוּ נַפְשֵׁי--אֶרִיק חֶרֶבִּי... 9 "The enemy said: **I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide** the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; **I will draw** my sword..." (Ex. 15)

In Song of *Ha'azinu*, the examples are too many to list. Here are but a few:

ג כִּי שֵׁם יְהוָה, אֶקְרָא: הָבוּ גִדְל, לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ. 3 For **I will proclaim** the name of YHWH; ascribe ye greatness unto our God. (Deut. 32:3)

20 And He said: **'I will hide** My face from them, **I will see** what their end shall be...
 כ ויאמר, אֶסְתִּירָה פְּנֵי מַה־ם, אֲרֹאֶה, מָה אַחֲרֵיהֶם...
 21 ... and **I will rouse** them to jealousy with a non-people; **I will provoke** them with a vile nation.
 כא ... וְאֲנִי אֶקְנִיאֵם בְּלֹא-עָם, בְּגוֹי נָבֶל אֲכַעִיסֵם.


Logic might dictate that we prefer to translate according to a grammar what would fit the large majority of cases, not the rare exception. Accordingly, the line could refer to "rooting out" that is yet to be, if the nation would only use its resources wisely.

THE HORIZONTAL LINE, A SIGNED WARNING TO HEARKEN



However simple and straightforward the Hebrew of the vertical line, the horizontal line was even more straightforward to read – *once the correct direction of the text was understood*. After a lengthy attempt at deciphering the message from right to left, I nearly gave up. This was tried first, as it is the traditional direction of Hebrew, in addition to the observation that the letters in the vertical column that show direction, such as the א-aleph, are aligned right to left.

When I finally tried to read the sequence from left to right, I was amazed at how plainly it reads. Only later I would notice that, indeed, the letters were inscribed in the opposite direction from that of the vertical line. This is most easily noticeable in the direction that

the aleph  faces (see diagram on page 10). In the vertical inscription the א-aleph (characters 1 and 11) face towards the left. In the horizontal line, the א-aleph (characters 4 and 7) face towards the right. There can be no doubt as to what direction this line was meant to read. Turned around from left to right, the sequence is:

שמע אמר ארבע

To my reading, this is also pure, simple Hebrew, and a straightforward message:

שמע * אמר * ארבע

It most plainly reads: - **Hearken** [to this], **says Arba**!

Understanding the Meaning and Biblical Hebrew Context of Each Word and Phrase

שמע! - Hearken [to this]

This is precisely parallel to the public rallying cry of שמע-Shema` (Hearken) we find in Deut. 20:

2 And it shall be when ye draw nigh unto the battle that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people,
 ב וְהָיָה כִּקְרֹבְכֶם אֶל הַמִּלְחָמָה וְנָשָׂא הַכֹּהֵן וְדִבֶּר אֶל-הָעָם.
 3 and shall say unto them: **'Hear [Hearken], O Israel,** ye draw nigh this day unto battle against your enemies, let not your heart faint, fear not nor be alarmed, neither be ye affrighted at them;
 ג וְאָמַר אֲלֵהֶם 'שְׁמַע: שְׂרָאֵל, אַתֶּם קְרֹבִים הַיּוֹם לַמִּלְחָמָה עַל-אֹיְבֵיכֶם, אַל-יֵרָד לְבַבְכֶם, אַל תִּירָאוּ וְאֵל תַּחֲפֹזוּ וְאֵל תַּעֲרָצוּ מִפְּנֵיהֶם.

That is not to mention the public call to "hearken" in what would become the *Shema`* prayer:

ג וְשָׁמַעְתָּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְשָׁמַרְתָּ לַעֲשׂוֹת, 3 **Hearken** therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that
אֲשֶׁר יִיטֵב לָךְ, וְאֲשֶׁר תִּרְבוֹן מְאֹד... it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily...

ד שְׁמַע, יִשְׂרָאֵל: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְהוָה אֶחָד. 4 **Hear**, O Israel: YHWH our God, YHWH is one.

It is clearly related to the message in the vertical column, as it is giving a command to "hearken" – that is, to the message of the tall, vertical line of text, *from the end of which it begins, extending at a 90° angle*. That this line is written in the opposite direction, even the characters themselves, implies great respect for the vertical message, if not for the one who inscribed it. It signifies that the writer did not want his own words of approbation to be confused with the message it intended to strengthen.

Accordingly, it plainly warns the passerby to hearken to those words; to be "for the Father" by not acting selfishly with manna, a real-world phenomenon in the Sinai Desert until this day (see Addendum). And it boldly does so in the name of the inscriber, Arba`. It is a signed approbation.

Arba` - says אמר ארבע

WHO IS ARBA`? THE FULL CONTEXT

The simplest explanation is that it is plainly the name of the one who wrote the message to "hearken". Being the name of a powerful lord in Canaan, it is likely to have been a common name among the Hebrews, although we do not know it as such from the limited name pool found in the Pentateuch.

טו וְשֵׁם חֶבְרוֹן לְפָנִים קָדִימָה אֲרָבֶּעַ, 15 Now the name of Hebron beforetime was Kiriath-
הָאָדָם הַגָּדוֹל בְּעֵינֵי הָאֲנָכִים; וְהָאָרֶץ שָׁקֵטָה, מִמִּלְחָמָה. Arba`, **Arba` being the greatest man** among the
`Anakim. And the land had rest from war. (Joshua 14: 15)

Just as the Spanish and Italian name Primo, meaning "first" (from the Latin name *Primus*) was given to an eldest son, and Quinto, meaning "fifth" (from the Latin *Quintus*) was given to the fifth child,² Arba` ("four" in Hebrew) could simply have been a name denoting the fourth-born child.

In context, this Arba` appears to have been a senior person of influence. He could well have been a Levite (as they who sided with Moses in Ex. 26:28, or a priest as the one who cries out *Shema`* in Deut. 20:2-3) or a chief – such that his approbation carried weight, lending strength to the vertical message. Altogether, the two inscriptions read:

אֵת שְׁמִי * גִּן * דָּד *
מִי * לֵאב * בִּמְנָד *
שְׁמַע * אִמְר * אֲרָבַע

**Lo I root out an oppressed (or "lowly") Garden!
Who is for the Father in regards to your manna?!
- Hearken [to this], says Arba`!**

It is entirely possible that the vertical text was inscribed by a major military leader besides Moses – Joshua (the leader-to-be who could have made such an inscription to help prove himself), or Hur, Moses' second-in-command at the time. I believe that my interpretation of the vertical column is most consistent with an inscription by Moses himself. Of the three, only Moses is remembered for his scribal activity during the Exodus. While the degree of respect for a high-ranking official in the Israelite camp can only be imagined, we can only be certain that an inscription by Moses would warrant such a subservient approbation by a lesser chief such as Arba', if my interpretation is correct.

It is Moses who had just taught the nation how to collect and eat manna at the very previous encampment, that of *Midbar Sin (Wadi el-Humr)*, so close to Serabit el-Khadim/Dofqah (Num. 33:12).

My initial concept paper on Sinai 357 (2017) revealed just how significant this is, considering what is arguably the strongest scholarly candidate for the earthly identification of biblical manna (there are more than one) – a very "this world" phenomenon, even in ancient Jewish tradition: the crystallized honeydew of scale insects, particularly that of *Trabutina mannipara*, the Tamarisk manna scale. Until this day, Wadi el-Humr is notable for its abundance of tamarisk trees.

(For for on biblical manna and the relevant Torah verses, see the Addendum, *Manna: Real-World Desert Nourishment, Then and Now.*)


Nonetheless, before the above reading is accepted, we must have confidence in my letter identifications for character 4 of the vertical inscription as *ψ-shin*, and character 5 as *λ-gimmel*, in light of other opinions.


WHY  IS NOT *ϐ-SAMEKH*, BUT A VARIANT OF *ψ-SHIN*


In our discussions, David Rohl asked me to consider the possibility that the fourth character was actually a *ϐ-samekh*. Here are several reasons why such this glyph makes much better sense as *ψ-shin*:

1. *Samekh* should reflect a real-life object or concept in the early Hebrew universe beginning with that letter. It is clearly related to the verb *מִסְכָּה*-*smk*, meaning to "support"

or "lean [upon]".³ There is nothing I can imagine in this figure  that connotes support of any kind.

2. *Samekh* should have some common element with the Paleo-Hebrew form , such that it represents an earlier stage that would evolve into the later form. Such is not the case, as there is no resemblance or common feature whatsoever between this shape and the glyph in question.

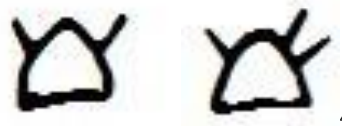
3. The figure  loosely resembles the later Paleo-Hebrew character for *ψ-shin*

 They are oriented the same, and both have raised arms and a raised center. Moreover, it shares key points of shared morphology with the more confirmed *ψ-shin*.

4. The glyph in question shares the key "w" feature that would be inherited by the Paleo-Hebrew/Phoenician *ψ-shin* with the confirmed glyph for *ψ-shin*, character 1 of the horizontal line. This suggests that they are variants that would eventually amalgamate into one form.



The confirmation of that character (glyph 1 of the approbation by Arba`) as *ψ-shin* is tied to its being drawn with either 2 or 3 protrusions:



While there is an opinion that this represents *ψ-shemesh* (sun), a rising or setting sun on the horizon with its rays,

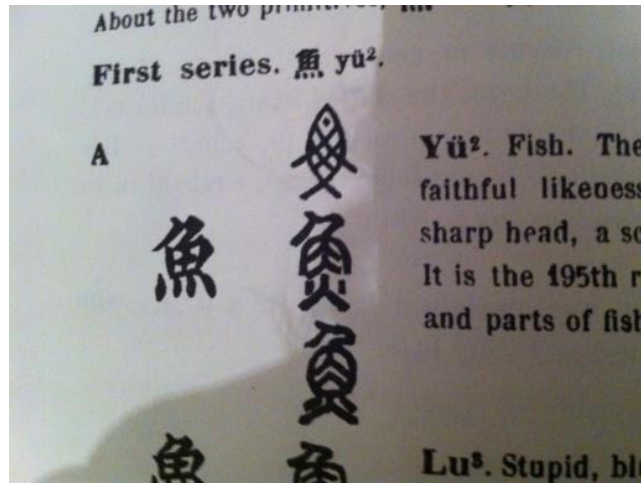
I contend that that this depicts the actual object of the letter name, *ψ-shen* (tooth). It is an approximate depiction of a disembodied human tooth with its roots. This glyph is the true namesake of the letter *ψ-shin*.



5. The presence of variant glyphs in an early stage before they merge or one is chosen seems to have been the rule for written languages in early development – not the exception. Here is an example from Chinese:

Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of a unified China and founder of the Qin dynasty, ruled from 220 to 210 BCE.⁶ In the service of his master's efforts to unify China politically and culturally, his minister Li Si helped systematize the written Chinese language. He did this by imposing the *small seal script*, already in use in the state of *Qin*, as the imperial standard. In the process, variant glyphs from the Qin script were proscribed, along with variants from different regions that had been conquered.⁷

Many variant glyphs are still found in the ancient small seal script that survived several episodes of book burning in China. The character Xún (尋), meaning "to wind" (as in thread), has two variants that are quite distinct.⁸ In the image below, three variants of Yú (魚), meaning "fish", are portrayed:⁹



Similarly, the character Shì (事), meaning "to serve; any affair, thing, or matter" has four different versions.¹⁰ Dān (丹), the glyph for cinnabar (the red mineral employed in Chinese alchemy) also has four variants.¹¹ There is little doubt that the variant forms of these glyphs before Qin Shi Huang were even more numerous.

Moses, to whom Israel's founding national writings are attributed, was just such a "first emperor" for his nation and the mixed multitude that joined the Exodus. While he would have begun a standardization of the written language, up to and through the period of his rulership, variant forms of Proto-Sinaitic would have been common.

That these are two inscriptions were written within a short period of time of one another, employing disparate variants of *w-shin*, supports and is supported by an Exodus context. I have already demonstrated why that they indeed make the most sense as the work of two writers. The Exodus from Egypt was an event that brought very distinct groups of people to form a new nation together. In that historical context (our preference, again, due to the nearly undeniable mention of manna and the greatly significant location in regards thereof), the scribes involved may well have been men from distinct backgrounds and scribal schools.

This would be consistent with the vertical text being the writing of none other than Moses. As a common Israelite, Arba' would likely have received his training in Proto-Sinaitic among common, Hebrew scribes of the Nile Delta, employing a more current, popular form at that time. Moses would likely have been trained in a more traditional form of the script in his schooling in the Egyptian palace, and in an earlier generation some 70 years before the Exodus.



Regarding the second glyph in question, character 4:

I support the proposal of שדיים-*shadayim* (breasts) as the namesake for this glyph. Besides the strong visual match, other terms that this shape could bring to mind – שפל-*shephel* (hill-country) and שפיפון-*shefifon* (viper) – would be redundant, in light of confirmed namesakes of other Proto-Sinaitic characters.

The widespread sense of the impropriety of the sight of naked female breasts in public in modern times is a function of the evolved concept of female modesty in the eastern and western civilizations. In ancient Egypt, nudity was not taboo. Men and women were both depicted minimally dressed and nude. Women's clothing was generally loosely-draped or see-through fabric, and female entertainers performed nude.¹²

In TaNaKh, female breasts are unabashedly mentioned in the context of fertility, blessing, and love. In Genesis 49:25:

כה מאל אביד ויעזרני, ואת שדי 25 Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee, and by
ויברכני, ברכת שמים מעל, ברכת the Almighty, who shall bless thee, with blessings of heaven
תהום רבצת תחת; ברכת שדים, above, blessings of the deep that coucheth beneath, blessings
ורחם. of the breasts, and of the womb.

In Song of Songs 4:5:

ה שני שדיך כשני עפרים, תאומי 5 Thy two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a
צביה הרועים בשושנים. gazelle, which feed among the lilies.





















If this logic is accepted, it truly strengthens my proposal that the two inscriptions are by two writers from distinct scribal schools, now brought close together in time and proximity. Again, it also increases the likelihood of an Israelite Exodus context.

WHY  IS NOT פ-PEH, BUT ג-GIMMEL

William Albright read character 5 of the vertical inscription not as ג-*gimmel*, but as פ-*peh*. Without belaboring the reader as to the difficulties this would create for the reading, here is why this is quite unlikely:

Although they are similar and commonly confused, Proto-Sinaitic (P-S) פ-*peh* (P), based on the word פינה-*pinah* (corner), is uniquely identified as a double-stroked bend *with an opening on one or both ends*. Due to those open end(s), it most likely represents the corner or bend of a road or thoroughfare:

 p s/z	 l	 g (gim)	 d (dam)	 p (pit)	 c (corner)
 s/z	 y	 g (gim)	 d (dam)	 p (pit)	 c (corner)
 s/z	 y	 g (gim)	 d (dam)	 p (pit)	 c (corner)

13

P-S ג-*gimmel*, on the other hand, is unanimously understood to represent the throwstick or boomerang. Accordingly, it seems to be identified as a solid or completely-closed angle. Only a solid or completely-closed shape can properly represent that hunting weapon.

It is possible that the acuteness of the angle is another difference. A boomerang forms an obtuse, or more open angle. On the contrary, it makes sense that a glyph denoting "corner" would be closer to a right angle to accentuate the meaning.

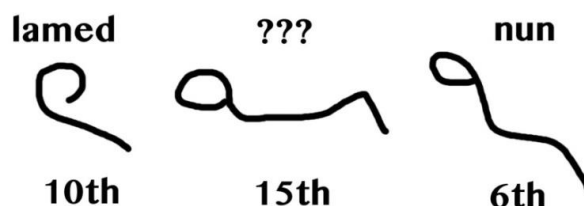
Phon. Value	Schematic Forms	Early North-west Semitic	Early South Semitic	Early Letter Names	Meaning of Names
ʔ		𐤀 (16th) 𐤁 (16th)	𐤂 𐤃 (Jamme)	ʔalp-	ox-head
b		𐤄 (17th) 𐤅 (18th)	𐤆	bêl-	house
g		𐤇 (15th) 𐤈 (12th)	𐤉 𐤊	gaml-	throw-stick

When one considers this logic, it is clear that the form of character 5 is more consistent with P-S 𐤇-gimmel, than 𐤅-peh.

WHY  IS NOT 𐤅-LAMED, BUT 𐤇-NUN

Out of desire to read the final three letters of the vertical inscription as מלך-melekh (king), some scholars may wonder if character 15 might be the P-S glyph for 𐤅-lamed, the cattle-goad.

The following simple graphic illustrates the question well:



14

Glyph 10 is an undisputed 𐤅-lamed. Glyph 6 is an undisputed 𐤇-nun, the נחש-naḥash (snake). What does that tell us about glyph 15? Considering my own bias, I asked five unwitting, uninitiated students of mine, without prompting them, what they thought. Every one of them chose 𐤇-nun. First, the perfectly-enclosed loop for a snake-head distinguishes it from the open P-S 𐤅-lamed. More striking is how, from middle shaft of the body, there is an upward curve –a "neck" leading up to the loop on the left, and a downward bend –a "tail" sloping downwards on the right. These are quintessential marks of P-S 𐤇-nun and clearly seen in glyphs 2 and 6 of this inscription and in the original Egyptian hieroglyph from which was taken, the cobra at rest:



15

We can rest assured that the 15th character is indeed a 𐤇-nun, and the final word is מנחמ-mankha/manakh (your manna); not מלך-melekh (king).

Understanding the Meaning and Biblical Hebrew Context of Each Word and Phrase

Entosh gan dakh, Mi l'Av b'manakh

There are alternative, albeit far less-likely readings that become possible if character 4 of this vertical inscription were ט-*samekh* rather than ש-*shin*, or if character 5 were פ-*peh*, rather than ג-*gimmel*. They are presented below, and why I believe that ש-*shin* and ג-*gimmel* make much better sense. I will now proceed to explain each word and phrase of this reading:

אנתש - Lo I root out

This appears to be referring to a past or ongoing act of destruction by God. The very real possibility that it should be read in the future tense is explored below, following the detailed explanation of this reading. Here is the same term as used in Jeremiah 1:10:

יִרְאֶה הַפְּקֻדֵי הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה עַל הַגּוֹיִם וְעַל
הַמַּמְלָכוֹת, לְנָתוּשׁ וּלְנָתוּץ וּלְהַאֲבִיד וּלְהָרוֹס
לְבָנוֹת וּלְנִטוֹעַ. 10 See, I have this day set thee over the nations and
over the kingdoms **to root out** and to pull down, and
to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

We see from this verse that the "uprooting" of לנתוש is not a term of final destruction, but the uprooting that must precede replanting. While the reasons for my preference of the past or present perfect tense over the future will become clear below, they depend on that key point in biblical grammar discussed at length above, in the explanation of the first phrase of Sinai 353.

As explained there – with over a dozen examples provided – the use of this archaic "past-future" verb form which is employed both in Job and in the Song of the Sea is significant to our proposal that this has an Exodus context: the Song of the Sea was reportedly sung *only weeks prior* to the Israelites' encampment in **Dofqah** – derived from the original, Egyptian name of Serabit el-Khadim: **Du Mofkat** (Mountain of Turquoise). In other words, this unique phrasing in the inscription and Sinai 357, analysed further on, fits the same in that biblical song.

Once again, as explained above, that rule that the נ-nun need fall in the "future" tense of this פ-*peh* verb was not firmly in place in early biblical times. In historical context, the usage of אנתש-*Entosh* is perfectly acceptable.

To reiterate: *that both Sinai 353 and Sinai 357, analysed and explained below, both open with a verb in this form, in this tense, in the first person, expressing a divine act, strengthens my proposal that they were composed by the same author, writing in a prophetic style.*

ג - garden

This is most likely referring to the Land of Egypt, whence the Israelites had just departed only weeks earlier. Again, it could, alternately, be referring to Canaan being held firmly in the hands of foes who were "defiling" it, in the eyes of the Hebrews. That it refers to Egypt seems more likely:

In the Torah, Egypt is viewed as an Eden-like garden, being compared to a גן-gan (garden) twice. In Deuteronomy 11, Moses explains to his people:

- י כי הארץ אשר אתה בא שמה לרשתה לא כארץ מצרים הוא אשר יצאתם משם, אשר תזרע את-זרעך והשקית בגלגלך כגן הירק. **10** For the land whither thou goest in to possess it, is not **as the land of Egypt** from whence ye came out, where thou didst sow thy seed and didst water it with thy foot, **as a garden** of herbs;
- יא והארץ אשר אתם עברים שמה לרשתה, ארץ הרים ובקעת; למטר השמים תשתה מים. **11** but the land whither ye go over to possess it is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water as the rain of heaven cometh down;

In fact, in Genesis 13, even the Eden-like region of Sodom and Gomorrah before their destruction is only compared to Egypt:

- י וישא לוט את עיניו וירא את כל כפר הירדן כי בלה משקה לפני שחת יהוה את סדם ואת עמרה, כגן יהוה כארץ מצרים באכה צער. **10** And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before YHWH destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, **like the garden of YHWH, like the land of Egypt**, as thou goest unto Zoar.

דד - oppressed [or "lowly"]

We see the meaning of this term in its use in Psalms 9:10:

- י ויהי יהוה משגב לדד, משגב לעתות בצרה. **10** YHWH also will be a high tower for **the oppressed**, a high tower in times of trouble.

This would be a most apt description of the Egypt just left behind by the Hebrews. It was indeed "oppressed" under the wicked pharaoh's brutal hand. With the Hyksos now moving in and taking control, it was still oppressed, albeit by different hands. With that wicked pharaoh and his army removed and the flower of Egypt dead, the "oppressed Garden" Egypt was now "rooted out", "cleared out" or "weeded".

מנן לאב? - Who is for the Father?

First, it is important to establish that אב - Av (father) was indeed a very actively used reference to God for the Hebrews, besides the more well-known names *El* and *Yah*. The best evidence for this is in Hebrew names going back to Israelites leaving Egypt. Exodus-era names:

- אהליאב – *Oholi-Av* meaning "Father is My Shelter [tent]"
- אליאב – *Eli-Av* meaning "My God is Father"
- אבירם – *Avi-Ram* meaning "My Father is Exalted"
- אביהו – *Avi-hu* meaning "He is My Father"

Post-Exodus names:

- אבישי – *Avi-shai* meaning "My Father is a Gift"
- אביחיל – *Avi-hayil* (Abigail) meaning "My Father is Mighty"
- יואב – *Yo-Av* (Joab), from יהואב - *Yeho-Av*, meaning "*Yah* is Father"
- אביה – *Avi-Yah* meaning "My Father is *Yah*", mother of Hezekiah. (I Chr. 2:24)

The God of Israel was not only referred to as "Father" in names, but very much perceived as such:

א בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם : לֹא תִתְגַּדְדוּ וְלֹא תִשְׂיִמוּ קָרָחַהּ בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם לָמֶת. **1 Children are ye to YHWH your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead.**
(Deut. 14: 1)

Reading the lone מ-*mem* as the full question word מי - *mi* (who?) is no stretch: it is what we would expect of the archaic defective spelling of that early period, when there were *matres lectionis* (letter vowels) were not written. When read accordingly, it is precisely parallel to Moses' cry, answered by his Levite brethren in Exodus 32:26, and it may be a strong clue as to its authorship:

כּו וַיַּעֲמֵד מֹשֶׁה בַּשַּׁעַר הַמַּחֲנֶה **26** then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said:
וַיֹּאמֶר 'מִי לַיהוָה אֵלַי' וַיֵּאסְפוּ אֲלָיו כָּל בְּנֵי לֵוִי. 'Who is for YHWH? -- let him come unto me!' And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.

במנך - in regards to [i.e. relating to and behaving properly with] **your manna?!**

Alternatively: "Whosoever is for the Father, is with (i.e. has, or will have) manna! In other words, "Whoever is righteous (i.e. staying on course with us in the desert, not returning to Egypt) will have manna to eat!" But the first interpretation seems more likely, since the prefix ב in the sense of "with" is used more in the use of an implement.

The prefix *Beth* (ב) means "in" and can mean "in regards to".

מן - *man* is plainly "manna" which, as explained above, is a natural phenomenon in the Sinai Desert until this day.

The final *khaph* (ך) denotes "your".

Exodus 16 and Numbers 11 (4-10) preserve a memory of how great a challenge it was for the Israelite leadership to get the Israelites to appreciate and behave properly in regards to the manna – not to hoard it, etc.

The ך-final *kaph* denoting "your" adds a certain bite, strengthening the message by personalizing it. What is being spoken of is "your" manna that is keeping *you* and *your family* alive.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

By applying a disciplined method of matching Proto-Sinaitic glyphs to what they most likely depict, a clear reading is deciphered for the two Mine-L inscriptions.

They are the work of two different authors, writing close in time and proximity to one another; the second approbating the first. Considering their location just opposite the entrance to the mine, my reading of the vertical inscription in larger script is consistent with a notice by an important, official Israelite leader to a small group of visitors, probably a higher echelon of chiefs. This is because, while it can accommodate several grown, seated men, Mine L is a small space.

It appears to be a rallying cry to the nation's leadership not to behave selfishly in regards to the manna by reminding of them of the fearsome act of God rooting out the evil of Egypt or uprooting them from it. (Alternatively, it could be in light of the greater vision of liberating their Promised Land.) It is referred to as an "oppressed Garden", likely referring to the oppression of the Pharaoh and/or the Hyksos.

If the interpretation is correct, while the author could be Hur or Joshua, it would most likely be Moses himself for the following reasons:

- Being that Mine L is a small space, it fits what is reported of Moses, that he would dwell separately from the camp, ensconcing himself in a separate tent (Ex. 33,7-9), where individuals could meet with him. At this particular encampment, he might have preferred this deserted turquoise mine for the same purpose.
- The vertical inscription's author seems to have been awe-inspiring; his promise to clean out the Promised Land (written in the first person singular) is meant to inspire the nation to behave properly with their resources along the way.
- His message is parallel to Moses' call to his Levite brethren "Who is for YHWH - to me!" (Ex. 32:26), while it also bears a similarity to a later call by Joshua (Josh. 25:14).
- He is a man whose written word is so important, that another individual, apparently of high standing, not only inscribes his written support, but does so with a marked deference.

For a further exploration of the likelihood of Mosaic authorship, see Section IV: *Who Wrote Them?*

If the interpretation is correct, this second writer by the name of "Arba'", likely to have been an influential Levite or chief unknown to Scripture, comes at a later time (anywhere from a few days to a few months later) and reverently adds his strength and reputation to the message. His different style *ψ-shin* suggests he was from a distinct background, perhaps that of a common Hebrew scribe. As "a man of the people", his signature would win more support among the chiefs. He effectively writes: "Arba' says to hearken to this message." In a sign of great respect if not subservience, his affirmation is written at the bottom of the main message in characters that are smaller and face the opposite direction, presumably so his words would not be confused with the main message that he is strengthening.

Although this historical reconstruction contains much educated conjecture, it is built on a solid translation, and very much suggested by its parallels with biblical verse, and the geographical and temporal context of the inscriptions.



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Sinai 357 (courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology Tel Aviv University) obtained by B. Sass 1988

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D. Sinai 361: No More Strayers to Ba`alat after a Frightful Year that Saw “the Enslaver Removed”

This is the fourth and final inscription of three I am calling “Mosaic” (including Sinai 353, above, and 349, above). It is the only P-S inscription described in this paper found at Mine N – a short walking distance from Mine L – and in a distinct hand. Nonetheless, it, too, appears to be pure, archaic Hebrew, written by the same, single author, and its parallels and cross-connections with the other three readings provide mutual support for all the readings.

Like the other Exodus-era inscriptions presented here, it is a polemical rally against that cult of Ba`alat. Here it takes the approach of recounting the removal of “the enslaver” (the Pharaoh), and how, by the end of “the year” – interpreted to signify the period of the dramatic upheaval of nature (the Plagues), attributed to the traditional Deity of Israel’s patriarchal forebears – there were no more Hebrews (in Egypt) “straying to Ba`alat”. This “year” is described in detail in Section III-C.

I present here my previous reading¹ as an alternative, which would reveal a polemical challenge to the followers of Ba`alat similar to that found in Sinai 357 and 349, and with a parallel structure: It would open with a statement proclaiming the removal of the tyrant, followed by a jab at or lament over those whose “year is over” (a year of freedom?), who now stray (נע-נ) to בעלת-Ba`alat.



By Douglas Petrovich, with a slight modification: As W. Albright and David Rohl, I see י-z, not ב-b in the shape of glyph 1 on the far-right column. Accordingly, a small change was made to the shape, and it is now labeled י-z.

2

Here are the lines of text, transcribed into classical Hebrew letters:

Reading column by column from right to left, with equivalent English and modern Hebrew characters. *Matres lectionis* (letter-vowels) are added within brackets []:

(left to right) 

right-most column, top to bottom: z[h] sh ḥ b sh n m sh

column 2 from the right, top to bottom: a z t m[h] h

column 3 from the right, top to bottom: sh n[h] t m h n ` l

column 4 from the right, top to bottom: b ` l t

 right to left)

left (top to bottom): ש נ מ ש ח ב ש [ה]ז

center (top to bottom): ה [ה]מ ת ז א

right (top to bottom): ת ס ה נ ע ל ב ע ל ת [ה]ש

Hebrew sentence division with English translation:

**The one who bound [in captivity] was
removed.
Then the year ended,
[and] ended [no more] were those who
strayed to Ba`alat!**

**זה שחבש נמש.
אז תמה השנה,
תם הנע לבעלת!**

Understanding the Inscription and Its Significance

Again, this, too, appears to be a polemical jab or lament against the cult of Ba`alat, but one that takes a cooler, more educational approach. It is the only inscription that actually seems to make reference to the series of natural upheavals that would be memorialized in the Pentateuch as the Plagues and the pharaoh who perished in them.

After stating, essentially that “the Enslaver has been removed”, it makes its polemical move in a second statement, tantamount to: After that year of Plagues [orchestrated by their traditional Deity] was finished [by which the Enslaver was removed], also “finished” (תם-gone, no more) were those who had strayed (“wandered” [נ-נע] [n-nē]) – to the cult of Golden Lady, the cow-goddess Ba`alat. None were left.

As explained above for Sinai 353 and 349, this would have been directed at the Hebrew slaves who were stranded at the seasonal mines of Serabit el-Khadim, outside of Egypt proper. Still attached to the cult of Ba`alat, the Golden Cow-goddess, these Hebrews may have been the ערב רב – the mixed multitude that, per tradition, brought about the “Golden Calf/Heifer” incident in Exodus chapter 32 (Ex. 12:38, 32:7 see Rashi ad loc.).

This inscription served as a sign post, giving them the following message: whereas there had been Ba`alat worshippers among the Hebrews in Egypt proper, they had either died in the upheaval or returned to the faith to the Deity of Israel’s forebears. It is implied that Ba`alat worshippers faced the same choice. There was no place for Ba`alat worshippers among the Israelites. They were expected to fall in line with the ancient Patriarchal faith.

Opening with a first statement tantamount to "the enslaver has been removed", its second statement then points a finger to those Hebrews who, only after a single "year finished" since the Exodus, now stray –literally This is portrayed as a gross display of ingratitude and impiety, after the Divinely-orchestrated fall of the tyrant who had brutally held them captive.

While this is a sister inscription to the Mine L inscriptions – Sinai 353, 357 and 349 – it is not a twin. On one hand, the literary style is especially parallel to that of Sinai 357, suggesting a common composer:

- There are rhymes found in both opening statements of vertical text (as explained above), the Mine L inscriptions follow the same structure: There we had:

"Entosh gan **dakh**; mi le-Av be-man**ákh**".

So, too, does the first line here, a vertical inscription, appear to rhyme:

"Zeh she-ḥav**ásh**, nim**ásh**"

- The opening statement recalls a miracle –"Lo I uproot an oppressed Garden"– while the second delivers a challenge to faithlessness: "Who is for the Father in regards to your manna?!" The same structure is found here.
- The opening statement recalls a miracle: "The one who bound [in captivity] was removed." The challenge to faithlessness: "Then their year was finished – they who stray towards *The Lady*."

On the other hand, as we will see in Section IV, in the chart "Letter Comparison Chart of the Four Inscriptions", Sinai 361, alone, seems to be clearly written by a distinct hand from the common one likely to be behind 353, 349 and 357. Moreover, it, alone, was found at Mine N, whereas the other three were all found at Mine L. And unlike 353, the columns are read from right to left, not from left to right.

Therefore, although the script of all four is very similar, representing work of the same time period (see chart in Section III), I would suggest that Mine N represents a distinct scribe working in tandem with that of Mine L. Not only writing in tandem, in the same air of prophetic rebuke, but in a parallel phrase structure.

As will be demonstrated more fully in Section IV, while it is speculative, it is reasonable to suggest that one of these authors, mostly likely the common hand behind Sinai 353, 357, and possibly 349, was none other than the historical Moses himself, while 361 most likely a subordinate scribe, writing down the words of the priestly chieftain.

Understanding the Meaning and Biblical Hebrew Context of Each Word and Phrase

STATEMENT #1

ז(ה)

This, The one

The first statement begins with what appears to be an archaic, defective form of the reference pronoun ז(ה)-zeh, at a time when there may not have been any *matres lectionis*

in Hebrew. As a reference to a person, it is a pejorative term, as we see in the following examples. It is the way that (a) YHWH refers to Abram's servant, when revealing he would not be Abram's heir, (2) the restless Israelite rabble refer to Moses who had disappeared from them, (3) the Philistine king Akhish speaks of David before those begging to have the Hebrew ejected from their midst:

Gen. 15:4

ד וַהֲנִיחַ דְּבַר יְהוָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר, לֹא יִירָשְׁךָ 4 And, behold, the word of YHWH came unto him, saying: 'This [man] shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.'

Ex. 32:1

א וַיֵּרָא הָעָם, כִּי בָשַׁשׁ מֹשֶׁה לָרֶדֶת מִן הָהָר; וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם עַל אַהֲרֹן, וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו 'קוּם עֲשֵׂה לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לִפְנֵינוּ, כִּי זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מִמִּצְרָיִם מִצְרָיִם, לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מָה הָיָה לוֹ.' 1 And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him: 'Up, make us a god who shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him.'

I Samuel 29:3

ג וַיֹּאמְרוּ שָׂרֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים, 'מָה הָעִבְרִים הָאֵלֶּה, וַיֹּאמֶר אַכִּישׁ אֶל שָׂרֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים, הֲלוֹא זֶה דָּוִד עֶבֶד שְׂאוֹל מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אִתִּי זֶה יָמִים אוֹ זֶה שָׁנִים, וְלֹא מָצָאתִי בּוֹ מַאֲוָמָה, מִיּוֹם נָפְלוּ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.' 3 Then said the princes of the Philistines, 'What do these Hebrews here?' And Achish said unto the princes of the Philistines: 'Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, who hath been with me these days or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell away unto me unto this day?'

שחבש

who bound [in captivity]

Not only is "to bind captive; to imprison" among several definitions for חבש-*havash*, it may be the oldest meaning. It is found in that sense (and only in that sense) in the Job 28:11 and 40:13. According to rabbinical tradition, Job may be the oldest book in TaNaKh, according to the opinion that Job was a contemporary of Moses. The other use as to "bandage" or "bind wounds" might represent a later meaning, being found only in later books as Isaiah (3:7 30:26 and 61:1) and Psalms 147:3.

Job 28,11

יא מִבְּכֵי נְהֹרֹת חִבְשׁ, וַתַּעֲלֶמָה יָצָא אוֹר. 11 He bindeth the streams that they trickle not, and the thing that is hid bringeth He forth to light.

Job 40,13

יג טְמִינֵם בְּעָפָר יַחַד, פְּנִיֵהֶם חִבְשׁ בְּטָמִיּוֹן. 13 Hide them in the dust together, bind their faces in the hidden place.

While it might be assumed that the prefix ש-*she*... as a shortened form of אשר-*asher* (who..., which...) is only an advent from later Hebrew, it is found at least as far back as Psalms and Ecclesiastes, and may be far older.

Psalms 146,3

ג אל תבטחו בנדיבים, בן-אדם 3 Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man **in** שֶׁאֵין לוֹ תְּשׁוּעָה. **whom** there is no help.

Ecclesiastes 1,9

ט מה שהיה הוא שיהיה, ומה שנגעשה הוא שיעשה, ואין כל 9 That **which** hath been is that **which** shall be, and that **which** hath been done is that **which** shall be done, and חדש תחת השמש. there is nothing new under the sun.

נמש

is/was removed

As explained at length above in the analyses of Sinai 353 and 349, the verb *נמש*-*msh*, with its consistent meaning "remove" or "depart", is found in several places in the Pentateuch, such as Ex. 2:10, 13:22, and Num. 14:44.

Again, greatly significant to our contention that all these were written by the same scribe is that this verb is common to three of these four inscriptions: Sinai 353, 349, and 361.

STATEMENT #2

אז

Then

This is the classic, opening "story-telling" word that begins several biblical songs, such as the Song of the Sea and the Song of the Well:

Ex. 15:1

א אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל את השירה 1 Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto YHWH, and spoke, saying, 'I הזאת ליהנה, ויאמרו לאמר, 'אשירה ליהנה כי גאה גאה, סוס ורכבו רמה בים'. will sing unto YHWH, for He is highly exalted; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.'

Num. 21:17

יז אז ישיר ישראל את השירה 17 Then sang Israel this song, 'Spring up, O well – הזאת, 'עלי באר, ענו לה'. sing ye unto it.'

תמה השנה

the year (hashah) ended (tamah)

The verb *תום*-*tom* (to be finished, to be ended) is a very common term throughout Scripture. One of many examples is Gen. 47,15: *wa-yitom ha-keseif* (and the money was spent [finished]). We even find matches to the full phrase "the year ended" in Genesis and Leviticus:

Gen. 47:18

יח ותתם השנה ההוא, ויבאו אליו 18 And when that **year was ended**, they came unto him the second year, and said unto him: 'We will בשנה השנית ויאמרו לו 'לא נכחד מאדני כי אם תם הכסף ומקנה הבהמה אל-אדני: לא נשאר לפני אדני בלתי אם גופתנו ואדמתנו'. not hide from my lord how that our money is all spent, and the herds of cattle are my lord's; there is nought left in the sight of my lord but our bodies, and our lands.

In the example from Leviticus we find a truly perfect match, with the form שנת-*sh'nat* (year of...), where the suffix ה-*heh* becomes a ת-*tau* before the following word that completes the phrase. Here we have שנת ממכרו (**the year of** its being sold):

Lev. 25:29

כט 29 And if a man sell a dwelling-house in a walled city, then he may redeem it until **a year is ended** after it is sold; for a full year shall he have the right of redemption.

This year of plagues is discussed below in Section III-C.

[and] **ended** [no more] **were those who strayed to Ba`alat!**

תם הנוע

ended [no more] **were those who who stray** [lit. 'move as vagrant' or 'wander']

The verb נ-נע is plainly a pejorative term for "wander" or "move about as a vagrant", as we find in the curse of Cain:

Gen. 4,12

יב 12 When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a vagrant and a wanderer shalt thou be in the earth.'

In the context of the *inscription*, it appears to be more aptly translated as "stray".

One of many examples of ה-*heh* as the prefix "who" leading into a verb is Gen. 48,16:

טז 16 the angel **who** hath redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads and let my name be named in them and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.'

לבעלת

towards [or 'after'] **'The Lady' [Hathor]."**

This is the famous phrase whose reading is widely agreed upon by scholarship, and discussed in depth above. Frank Moore Cross is yet another scholar who states the established opinion that Ba`alat is a reference to Hathor.³



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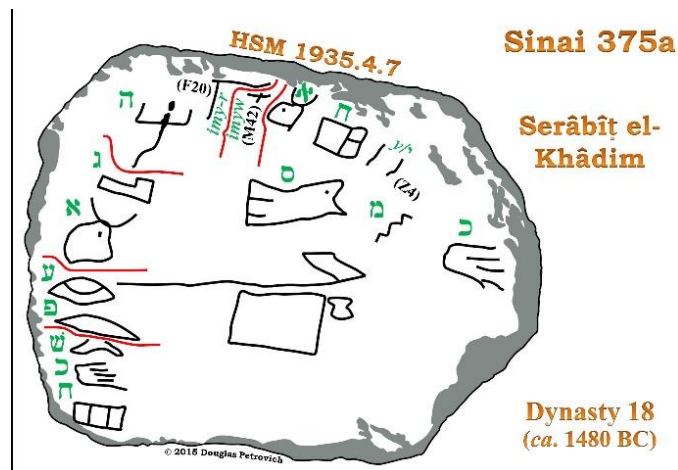
E. SINAI 375a: COULD THE MOST DIFFICULT INSCRIPTION FURTHER CEMENT THE PICTURE?

A Weary Hebrew Slave's Devotion to *Ba'alat*, Defaced by the Purge? *A Speculative Reading*

The final P-S inscription presented here, also found at Mine L, was the most excruciatingly difficult to decipher of any I have attempted. It took multiple attempts of hours-long, eye-exhausting scrutiny of the hi-resolution image below before arriving at a startling conclusion:

The stone is not only badly damaged; it seems to be *deliberately scrawled over* to make much of the image unreadable. This assertion may seem difficult to accept at first, but most of the horizontal lines should be disregarded, and some vertical lines as well. On the left-hand side, there even seems to be an attempt to write *over* the message.

It seems that those who have approached this stone before me, particularly Douglas Petrovich, were misled by these lines. In order to derive meaning from them, he needed to be very creative with his letter proposals and inconsistent with his direction of reading. Note how the professor is relating to some clear lines, while ignoring many others, including fainter ones underneath. With all respect, it is an over-simplification of a much more complex reality:



Petrovich's scheme of the lettering, above,¹ is very difficult to reconcile with the maddening complexity of what we see in the high resolution of Sinai 375a by Morenz.²



3

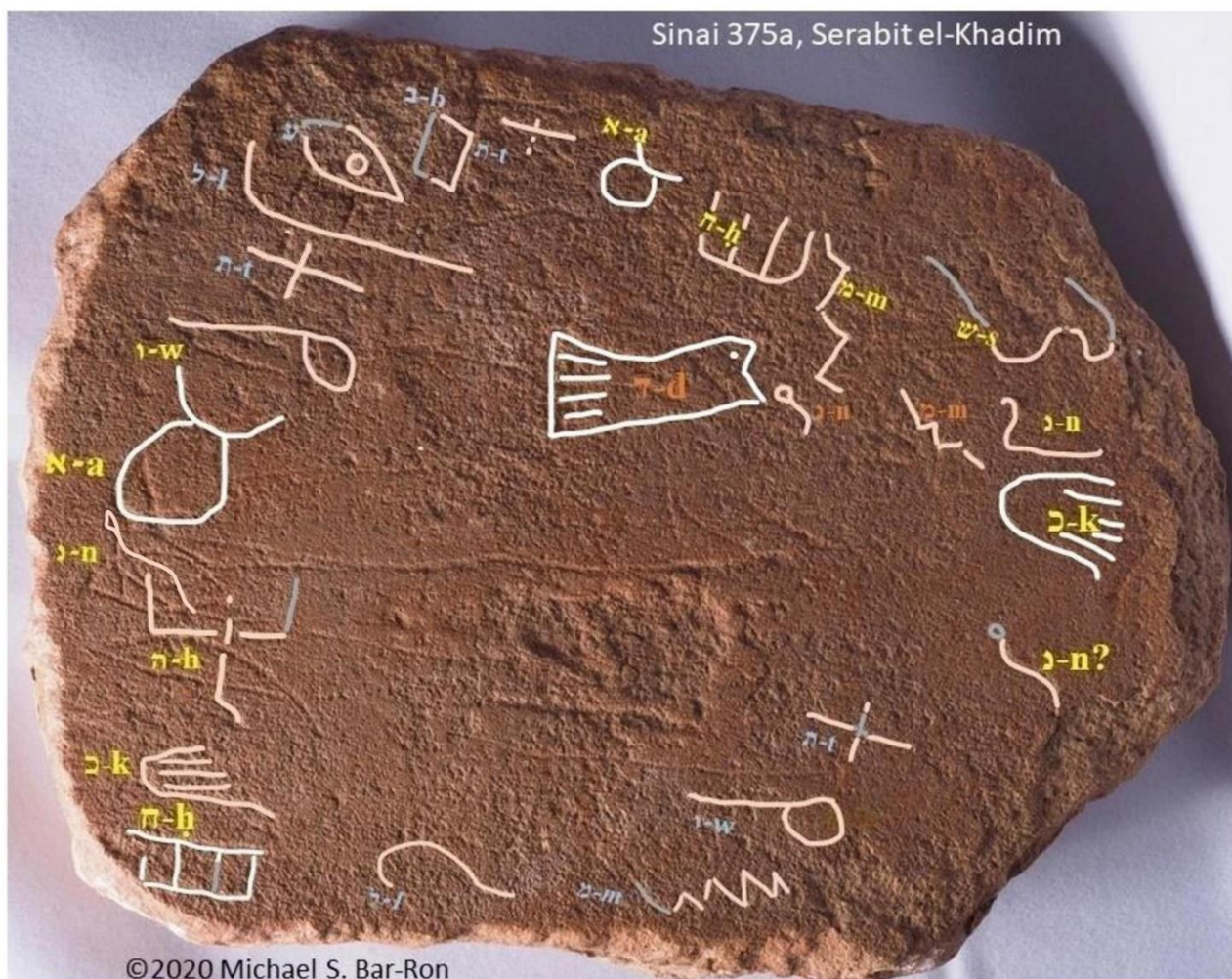
Here we see a maze of lines that I believe should be ignored. *Yellow* arrows point to horizontal lines that indicated scraping, as though the surface were scoured in order to erase it. *Light blue* lines indicate gouges that could be due to more natural causes, whereas the *white* arrows indicate lines and impressions that are more likely to be deliberate, as though to deface the inscription or corrupt the written message. I must admit that I, too, was guided, to a degree, by the lines that suggested letters that formed a message readable to me.

Nonetheless, after examining the image for so long, from every angle, I could begin to make out certain letters *underneath* the scrawling. This eventually yielded a result that sceptics may deem highly speculative, but one in which I feel a fair degree of confidence:

The message would seem to be plainly a cynical, groaning protest against the work for Ba'alat's pleasure, a complaint that there is no strength. Inserted in the middle of the stone face is another message, as though a post-script or the work of a later hand – perhaps the defacer himself: “They deserve to die”; literally “Their judgment is death”.

Also here, the biblical wording and themes, clues to the age of the writing, and the identification of the site with the fifth encampment of the Israelites (after crossing the Sea of Reeds) en route to Mt. Sinai, all suggest an Israelite Exodus context.

In tandem with all our above readings of Sinai 353, 349 and 357 – all found at Mine L – and 361, and William Shea's reading of Gerster No. 1, if this interpretation finds a reasonable degree of plausibility among scholars, Sinai 375a would further strengthen the context we suggest for these inscriptions: writing from the general time of the Exodus, pertaining especially to the Golden Calf incident. It would add a new element: the execution of polemical judgment against those who served Ba'alat.



Letters *in white* are agreed upon by nearly all scholars. Those *in beige* are those that seem readable to me, although not very clear. Lines in grey are assumed to be present, although not visible.

The text is to be read *boustrophedon*, in a circular direction, following the orientation of the face-characters. Here one begins from the right-hand corner, moving counter-clockwise:

The rows of text with equivalent English and modern Hebrew characters. *Matres lectionis* (letter-vowels) are added within brackets []:

(left to right, opposite the order on the stone)



Right side moving upwards: **n** **k**[w] **n**

Top*, moving left: **s** **m** **h**[w] **a** **t** **b**`**l****t**

Down the left side: **w** **a**[y] **n** **h** **k** **h**

Under the top line, moving right: **d**[y] **n** **m**

Bottom, moving right and upwards: **l** **m** **w** **t**

(right to left, as on the stone)



נ **כ**[ו] **ן**

ש **מ** **ח**[ו] **א** **ת** **ב** **ע** **ל** **ת**

ו **א**[ו] **ן** **ה** **כ** **ח**

ד[ו] **נ** **ם**

ל **מ** **ו** **ת**

Hebrew sentence division with English translation:

Right [Correct],	נכון,
do Ba`alat's pleasure [bring joy to Ba`alat]	שמחו את בעלת,
but there is no strength!	ואין הכח!
– They deserve to die [lit: their judgment	– דינם למות!
is death].”	

Whereas Douglas Petrovich believes the rough rectangle in the middle of the stone is the letter ב-b, it could well be a word or image that has been destroyed. It doesn't seem possible to restore what it was, but it may have been odious to whomever defaced the inscription.

My Interpretation:

This seems to me to be the mild protest of a Hebrew slave who is working the mines. The context seems to be that the workers are told that their labors bring joy to Ba`alat. He does not want to disparage, deny, or disrespect Ba`alat per se. His mild protest is against the bitter slave labor. He warns cynically, "Sure, right – make Ba`alat happy, but we haven't the strength!"

It cannot be known for certain if "they deserve to die" was part of the original message or possibly added later. Was it a part of the original protest, i.e. "judge those who enslave us deserve to die", or by those who scrawled the message out, as though to say, "those who served Ba`alat deserve to die".

In any case, someone seems to have detested the original message and tried to deface it, ostensibly to make the written message hardly readable. It cannot be known for certain if this was done by disapproving authorities or by later Israelites at the time of the Exodus when they were moving through.

The latter seems more likely to me because, (1) as purposefully damaged and scrawled over as the message is, the letters of the name Ba`alat are the most damaged of all, even partly erased. That would be a very fitting mark of the Israelite purge on Ba`alat worship. (2) The words "DNM LMWT" -- "they deserve to die" seem untouched by the scrawling. Either the scrawler wrote those words, or did not mind that they remain visible.

Right [Correct] - נכון

Although it can also mean “ready” (Gen. 41: 32, Ex. 34: 2), we see נכון-*nakhon* as “right/correct” in Ex. 8: 22, Deut. 13: 15 and 17: 4. We also find both usages in the Book of Job. There we find נכון-*nakhon* as “right/correct” in the most ancient Book of Job 42: 7 and 42: 8.

Do Ba`alat's pleasure [bring joy to Ba`alat] - שמח את בעלת

שמח-*smḥ* as the transitive verb “gladden” is found rare Scripture, as is its alternate form ממשח-*msmḥ*, this translation is simple and not forced. Proverbs 10: 1

1 The proverbs of Solomon: A wise son אִם מְשָׁלִי שְׁלֵמָה : בֶּן חָכָם יְשַׁמְחֵ אָב, וּבֶן כְּסִיל תוֹגֵת אִמּוֹ. maketh a father glad, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother.

The phrase above speaks about gladdening a father, the phrase in the inscription is about gladdening Ba`alat, and Judges 9: 13 speaks in regards to gladdening God:

13 And the vine said unto them: ‘Should I leave my יֵג וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הַגֶּפֶן, ‘הֲחִדְלֹתִי אֶת-תִּירוֹשִׁי הַמְשַׁמֵּחַ אֱלֹהִים וְאֲנָשִׁים, וְהִלַּכְתִּי לָנוּעַ עַל הָעֵצִים?’ wine which cheereth God and man, and go to hold sway over the trees?

but there's no strength - ואין הכח

Even though it is not found in the Pentateuch per se, the phrase here is a simple and the meaning is incontestable. There is a simple, direct equivalent in Isaiah 37: 3:

3 And they said unto him: ‘Thus saith Hezekiah: This day יוֹם-צָרָה וְתוֹכָחָה וְנֶאֱצָה הַיּוֹם is a day of trouble and of rebuke and of contumely; for the children are come to the birthing stool, and there is not strength to give birth. אֵין לָלֶדֶה.’

“they deserve to die [lit: their judgment is death].” - דיןם למות

Even though “deserving of death” is מיתה-*hayab mitah* and the “death penalty” is משפט-*mishpat mowet* (see Deut. 21: 22), we find in Book of Job 36: 17 that דין-*din* is synonymous with משפט-*mishpat*, and the term דין for “judgment” is found not only there, but in Job 35: 14, Deut. 17: 8, and a number of other places throughout in Prophet and Writings.

22 And if a man have committed a sin worthy of the death מָוֶת penalty and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree כִּבּוּ וְכִי יִהְיֶה בְּאִישׁ חַטָּא מִשְׁפָּט



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3. Bar-Ron, original work. Based on Morenz (above)
4. Bar-Ron, original tracing. Based on Morenz (above)

III. DATING THE INSCRIPTIONS, ISRAELITE SLAVERY, AND EXODUS TO THE 13th DYNASTY

A. How These Inscriptions Represent a Middle Stage, Older than Proto-Canaanite Inscriptions, Younger than Those at Wadi el-Hol

Before we present any reasoning as to why the 13th Dynasty is the most appropriate time-frame for these inscriptions and the events of the Exodus narrative, it is important to note that that timeframe is not essential to our proposal. In fact, **these inscriptions could have been written at an appropriate time period for the Exodus according to any of the accepted chronological timeframes for it.** Whether that be the high date, early in the Second Intermediate Period, or a lower date in the New Kingdom Period.

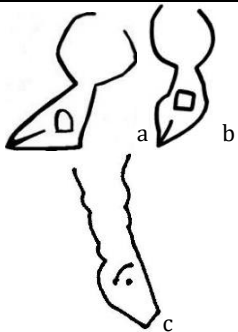

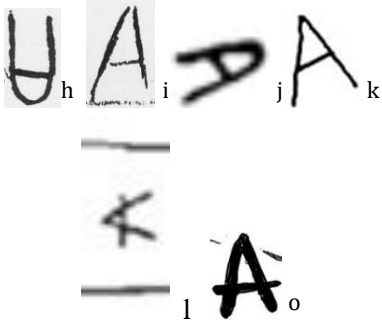
That is because all we can derive directly from analysing the script is that it represents a clear, intermediary stage between the earliest stage of Proto-Sinaitic script, widely agreed to be during the reign of Pharaoh Amenemhat III and the later stage, represented by the range of Semitic inscriptions of Late-Bronze Age Canaan.

That is an important place to begin.

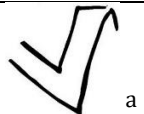


The following graph visually demonstrates this picture, enabling us to see the clear development of 11 Hebrew letters across no fewer than 15 inscriptions, in three columns: In the left column, we have glyphs from the inscriptions dated to the early, Amenemhat III period: the Wadi el-Hol inscriptions and Gerster No. 1 (see Section V below). In the middle column, glyphs from the inscriptions under scrutiny: Sinai 353, 349, 357, 361. In the right column, we bring several examples of Proto-Canaanite and early Paleo-Hebrew writing from the Levant.

Analysed thus, we can clearly see that our “Exodus Inscriptions” appear to be at an *intermediary* stage of development between the two: Their letter-glyphs are slightly more highly evolved than those at the earliest stage, and seem to be en route to achieving the forms of the same letters in the Late-Bronze and early Iron Ages inscriptions. That period generally corresponds to the biblical era of the Judges, a few centuries after the Exodus from Egypt would most likely have taken place.

The Stage of Development to which Sinai 353, 349, 357 & 361 Belong


Letter Name	EARLY STAGE Wadi el-Hol, 12 th Dynasty	MIDDLE STAGE Sinai 353, 349, 357, 361	LATER STAGE Proto-Canaanite Inscriptions from the Levant
𐤀-aleph ox head			

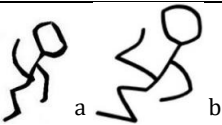
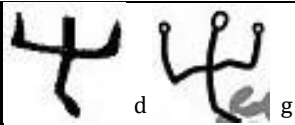
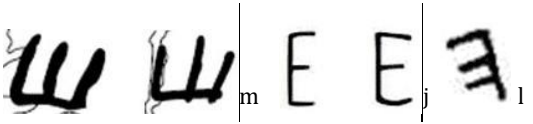
𐤀-aleph the bull, detailed at first, becomes ever more abstract. By its middle stage, it seems that some scribes still included the pupil as a dot, but the large pupil, mouth, and long, curved horns are lost. It is on its way to the late form found in early Proto-Canaanite/Paleo-Hebrew.

𐤁-gimmel throw-stick			
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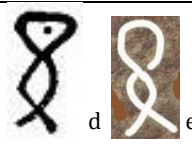
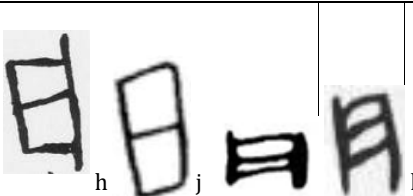
Like the letter 𐤁-tau (below), it seems that 𐤁-gimmel the throwstick began as a double-lined glyph, becoming a single line by the middle stage. It evolves into rounded forms by the late stage. (The Wadi el-Hol glyph could well be 𐤁-peh, the wall corner, a very similar glyph, leaving us without an early-stage 𐤁-gimmel.)

𐤃-dag (daled) fish			
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Although the Hebrew “D” sound came to be called *daled*, which means and represents a door, it is widely agreed that the original Proto-Sinaitic symbol was a fish, called *dag* in Hebrew. It begins as a more complex image of a fish with two sets of fins. It resembles the hieroglyph for a type of fish called *Petrocephalus bane*  Gardiner sign no. K5) ^p It becomes more simple over time, losing one set of fins by the middle period, and all fins by the Proto-Canaanite/Paleo-Hebrew stage.




𐤄-heh dancing/ rejoicing man			
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𐤄-heh the dancing man becomes ever more abstract. By its middle stage, the legs merge into one, both arms turn upwards, and together with the lost head, we see three upraised lines. By the latter stage, leg and torso are gone and scribes begin to write it in the upright E form.


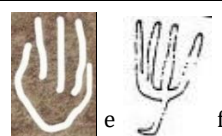

n-<i>het</i> thread	 a	 d e	 h j l
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n-*het*, entwined thread (*ḥwt* in Hebrew), reduces in number of parts and complexity. Beginning with three *circular* enclosures, it reduces by the middle stage down to two. By the third stage – that of Proto-Canaanite/early Paleo-Hebrew – the circular spaces become squared, with straight side strokes that become pronounced, and elongated. This shift to a divided *rectangle* surely represents a merging with the Egyptian



hieroglyph for wick  (“h”, Gardiner no. V28) with that for enclosure  (“ḥ”, Gardiner sign no. 06)^p by the same name (*ḥwt*, but in Egyptian).

Letter name	EARLY Wadi el-Hol, 12 th Dynasty	MIDDLE Sinai 353, 349, 357, 361	LATE Proto-Canaanite Inscriptions from the Levant
ʾ-yod arm with hand	 b	 d	 l o

At its earliest, ʾ-yod the arm begins as a single stroke (the stalk) opening into two: an open hand with thumb. By late stage it becomes the three-pronged glyph with a back-turned base. Our single example of the middle stage (from Sinai 353) may be atypical, extending another digit. However, while it is still a pictorial arm whose stalk points straight in the opposite direction from the digits, it is closer to the upright position of the later forms, and its open digits, too, are in the upper half.

כ-kaph hand-palm	 b c	 e f	 j n o
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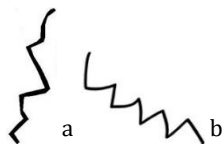
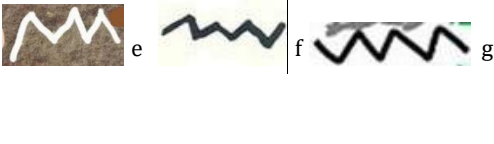
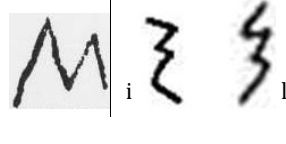
The early כ-kaph of the Wadi el-Hol inscriptions seems to a distinct way of representing ar


upturned palm with raised fingers and opposing thumb,  q, closer to the Egyptian hieroglyph “hand with palm up”:  (Gardiner sign no. D47)^p. It may intend to portr a thumb and opposing pinky finger curled inwards.

By its middle stage it has become the forward-facing, multi-digit hand. This form remains and evolves, simplifying by late stage into a three stroke image, en route to becoming K.



ל-lamed cattle-goad	 a b	 d f g	 l n
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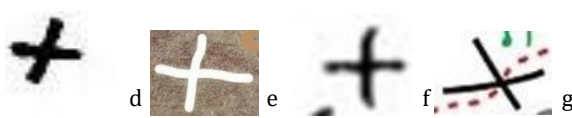

By the middle stage, the cattle-goad becomes a more circular swirl. By Proto-Canaanite/early Paleo-Hebrew, it becomes standard to draw it with the straight handle- end positioned upwards.


𐤌-<i>mem</i> water			
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Here the number of pointy ripples over time become fewer over time. The Wadi-el-Hol glyphs have numerous angle points (7-8), like the hieroglyph  (Gardiner sign N35 P); most of the middle-stage inscriptions have no more than 5-6. By late stage it is down to 3-4 points, closer to letter M.

𐤍-<i>'ayin</i> eye			
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𐤍-*'ayin* begins as a well-drawn eye with large pupil and a prominent, extended lash or eye-liner mark, as seen in the hieroglyphs  and  (Gardiner signs D7 and D10 respectively P). By the middle stage, the pupil is reduced in size (and may be absent in some cases), and the extension of the eye is all but gone. By the later Proto-Canaanite stage, it has been simplified to a simple circle with a dot within, or none at all.

𐤎-<i>tau</i> mark, sign			
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Like 𐤊-*gimmel* above, it is clear, even from an image of the stone, that 𐤎-*tau* in Gerster No. 1 was originally *double-lined*. Although there is no noticeable evolution between the middle and later periods, the letter seems to have undergone a simple evolution to a single-lined cross early on. Although it was now adopted to signify a different sound for the Hebrew tongue, the double-lined cross may have been taken from the hieroglyph  (Gardiner sign Z11 P).

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B. Mining and Literacy at Serabit el-Khadim in Dynasty XIII

Claiming that any particular inscription belongs to a particular point in time, let alone proposing a biblical context, requires good evidence.

Thus far we have only demonstrated how the readings of the inscriptions seem to strongly suggest an Exodus context, and their *relative* age – which could, in theory, fit an Exodus in several chronological schemes, for those who affirm that the Exodus tradition is historical.

For our case for an Exodus context (“Exodus Inscriptions”) to be considered by those unconvinced of a historical Exodus, we should be able to provide a strong case for linking the inscriptions to the timeframe where the strongest evidence for the Israelite Sojourn, Slavery, and Exodus is to be found: the 13th Dynasty. (We will then present some actual points of compelling, direct evidence for an Exodus at this time in Section III-C.)

The first stage is establishing that the inscriptions would have even been relevant for that time. How active were the mines of Serabit el-Khadim with Semite slave labor during that Dynasty? How literate were the Semites of that time? Would the common person have been able to read the inscriptions analysed above?

1. Hebrews Miners Active at Serabit el-Khadim in Dynasty XIII

We begin with the initial, foundational point that indeed, during the 13th Dynasty, *Serabit el-Khadim was busy with mining by Semitic/Hebrew slaves.*

In her research on ceramic remains retrieved during the French-Swiss Joint Expedition to Serabit el-Khadim in the 1990s (Universities of Charles de Gaulle Lille III and Geneva), Janine Bourriau concluded: not only were the ceramics produced locally, most likely by professional potters from the Memphite/Fayoum region, *they dated back the XIIth and early XIIIth Dynasty.* At that time, mining activity was increasing.¹ and the site was enlarged and embellished.² This view is supported by Valbelle & Bonnet in their work *Le sanctuaire d'Hathor, maitresse de la turquoise a Serabit el-Khadim au Moyen Empire*, where they published their Serabit findings.³



A fragment of a pot-stand in Nile B (By: P. Degryse). Middle - A XII-XIII dynasty pot and pot-stand from a cemetery at Lisht North in the Memphite region (Catalogue Metropolitan Museum of Art nr. 15.3.1592). Right - Limestone model of a pot and potstand found in the Tomb of Nakht at Lisht North (Catalogue Metropolitan Museum of Art nr. 15.3.98) ⁴

2. Hebrew Slaves of the Time of Dynasty XIII Could Read and Write

Another point important to our thesis, lest we wonder if the average Hebrew could even read these inscriptions, is that there was a strong literacy rate among Semites/Hebrews of our target timeframe. Besides what is suggested by the very Wadi el-Hol inscriptions themselves, beyond the pale of this paper, Dr. Kerry Muhlestein cites considerable evidence for this in the 13th Dynasty:⁵

As suggested by the tutor mentioned in the Brooklyn Papyrus, some Egyptian elite may even have been educated by Semitic slaves. Furthermore, as some Asiatics were working in the temple, they undoubtedly had regular contact with literate priests. Hence, there was more than ample opportunity for a cultural influence on an intellectual level to have taken place. This idea is strengthened when we realize that among the Asiatics, “certain strong personalities had already ascended to the office of kingship by early Dynasty 13.”^{117[6]} This idea is augmented when it is realized that Hetepibra, a king of the early 13th dynasty, carried the epithet ‘Son of the Asiatic.’^{118[7]}

(For more on the Brooklyn Papyrus and its significance in locating the Israelite Period, see Section III-C below.)

The greatest example of this, and one that suggests that the early Israelites could indeed have produced and benefited from literature such as that recorded in the Pentateuch, is a story that may be the highest literary achievement of the Middle Kingdom period: “The Shipwrecked Sailor”. Muhlestein and others believe it bears Levantine influence – one factor that could explain many of its odd features, which he describes. For example:

Robert Alter writes of word-for-word narrative repetition in Semitic sources that ‘every instruction, every prediction, every reported action had to be repeated word for word in an inexorable literalism as it was obeyed, fulfilled, or reported to another party.’^{130[8]} This repetition almost always took place in a command/fulfillment, prophecy/fulfillment, or command/report formula. These formats consisted of a prophecy of an event, or a command to execute an event, and then the narrative telling of the fulfillment of the command or prophecy couched in very similar, largely identical language. Canaanite,^{131[9]} Mesopotamian^{132[10]} and Biblical^{133[11]} literature abound with examples of this device (see below). As common as this literary device was with her Near Eastern neighbors, Egyptian literature from this era is largely bereft of the technique.



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In Mulhelstein pp. 21-22:

6. Hornung, *History of Ancient Egypt*, 71. He believes that these rulers, such as Khendjer and another actually called Asiatic, were probably able to 'wrest the kingship for themselves as military leaders.'
7. Gabriella Matthiae, "Relations Between Ebla and Egypt," 419–20.

Ibid. pp. 26-48:

8. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 88–113. He discusses in detail the device of repetition. Also see Long, *Framing Repetitions in Biblical Historiography*, 385–99; and Muhlestein, *The Use of the Palm of the Hand in the Rituals of the Tabernacle and Temple of Solomon*, 67–68.
9. See the command of Yam to his messengers and its fulfillment in 'Baal and Yam,' a Ugaritic myth in Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 40–42, and the commands of El to Keret and Keret's fulfillment of those commands, 83–89. There are many other examples available in Canaanite literature.
10. For one of many examples of this type of literature in Mesopotamian sources, see the twice commanded instructions of how to snare Enkidu by use of a harlot, and the fulfillment of this command in 'The Epic of Gilgamesh,' tablet I, columns iii–iv.
11. See Joshua 3:13–15; Exodus 25:10–20, Exodus 37:1–9. These are only two of many examples.

C. Dating the Israelite Period from the Late 12th through the 13th Dynasty

After initially making the case for a strong “Exodus context” to the content of the most likely readings of our four “Mosaic” P-S inscriptions (Section II), the initial points have been made for linking them to our 13th Dynasty *timeframe* of our case for the Exodus have been made: Hebrew slaves were indeed busy mining at Serabit e-Khadim, and they were literate.

Now we are free to present the strongest evidence for the Israelite Sojourn, Slavery, and Exodus, which is indeed found at that time. What is the actual historical evidence for the backbone of the Exodus narrative?

1. Evidence for the Israelites and Hebrews, the *Sojourn-Slavery-Plagues* Episodes from the Reigns of Amenemhat III through Dudimose

Being a nonessential, subordinate point to the proposal, a full presentation of the rich sets of evidence and synchronisms between the events of the Exodus and the history of the Semites in Dynasty XIII is beyond the pale of this paper; brevity is called for. Moreover, little is to be gained from an original presentation, even by an informed amateur in the field as myself. Particularly when the work has long been done so masterfully by a world-class authority on the material and arguably its most capable communicator, David Rohl.

To strike the balance between presenting the case for the sake of our proposal and brevity, I will present several key highlights from pages 103-165 of Rohl’s detailed, comprehensive presentation in *Exodus: Myth or History?* (2015),¹ with a few additions, annotated separately. It is a brief overview of the significant, if not conclusive evidence brought there, with several additions, that there was, indeed, a series of historical events, that culminated in the exit of a sizeable group of Semite slaves. A genuine, historical pattern of evidence that matches the biblical record, all rooted in a model Egyptian chronology of profound strength.

The Sojourn

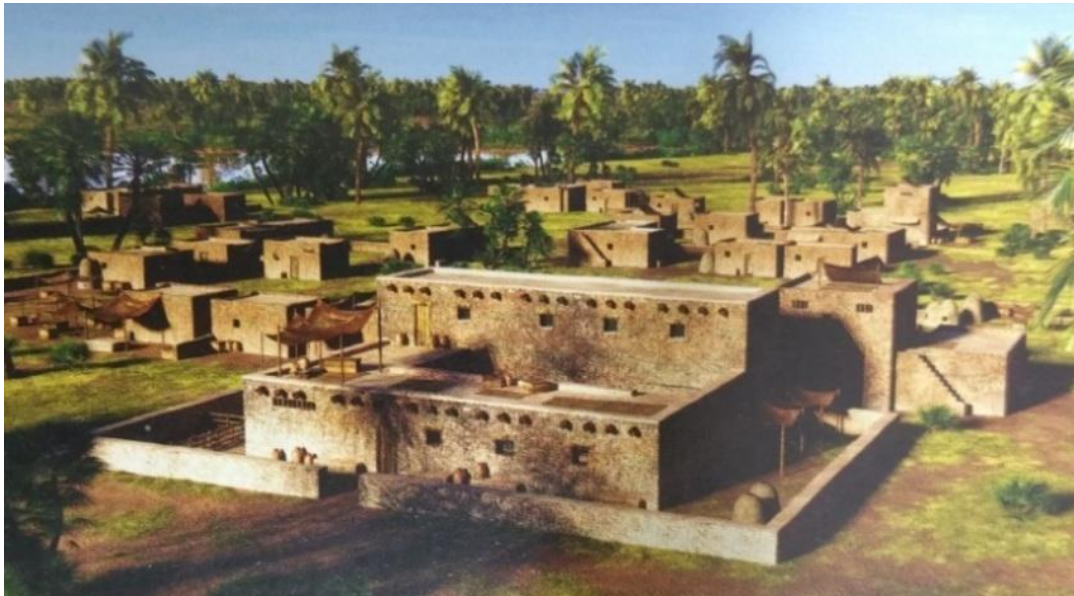
We should begin noting that there is academic consensus that Avaris (Tell ed-Daba) in the Nile Delta was biblical *Goshen*. The city there today is Faqus, originally “pa-Kes”, which evolved from pa-Gosem. Moreover, it is well established that it was, indeed, the bastion of the Asiatics in Egypt known as the *Apiru*, the source of the term “Hebrew”.

(The term was originally a general one that included all types of Semites, of which the Israelites were only one group. The Book of Samuel shows how distinct the Israelites once felt from non-Israelite “Hebrews”: In chapters 13:6-7 and 14:21-22, we see that only when the עִבְרִים-*Ivrim* (Hebrews) joined in battle together with the בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל-*Bene Yisrael* (Israelites) under King Saul, were the Philistines successfully routed.)

What seems under-appreciated in mainstream scholarship is that Stratum H at Tell ed-Daba reveals Goshen’s initial settlement by Semites in the 12th Dynasty of the Middle

Kingdom to have been *its very founding*. There no Hebrews in Goshen before these, as the urban center did not yet exist.

The had clearly been given royal permission to settle there, where they built a stately residence of a characteristic, non-native design, typical of Bronze Age dwellings found in sites such as Ḥarran, modern Syria. Every detail of this structure, again, *the very first in the area (Area F)*, precisely fits what we would expect of the bastion of the biblical Jacob, whose family originated in Ḥarran. Genesis records that they were given the open area of Goshen to settle, after arriving in Egypt from Canaan (Gen. 46:34-47:6).



2

For example: the excavation by Manfred Bietak of the Austrian Institute of Archaeology revealed that the Syrian-style, Semitic palace was clearly dismantled and replaced by what was found in the layer just above it, Stratum G/4 (again, 12th Dynasty). That is, a quintessential Egyptian palace, but one clearly belonging to a high-ranking *Semite/Hebrew* official.

This is clear on account of several finds there, including *12 large Semitic-style graves of senior persons* in the palace's garden cemetery. These contained 11 bodies buried in semi-fetal position, in vaulted tombs – quintessentially Semitic customs – together with pottery and weapons of Canaanite origin.

The 12th grave, believed to be that of the palace lord himself, was a pyramid tomb with a massive statue of powerful Semitic official, to commemorate his memory. Dorothea Arnold, Chairman of the Department of Egyptian Art, determining that the statue, which still bears pigments that remain from a *multi-coloured, striped coat* and other quintessential tokens of Semitic ethnicity, to have originated in the royal workshop of the Pharaoh Amenemhat III. This suggests he was none other than the vizier Ankhu, whose full name “Zatenaph Pa-Ankh” is essentially a direct match for the given Egyptian name of Joseph, צפנת פעה – Zaphenat Pa`neah. (Gen. 41.45).



Model of the palace garden cemetery, by the Austrian Archaeological Institute.³

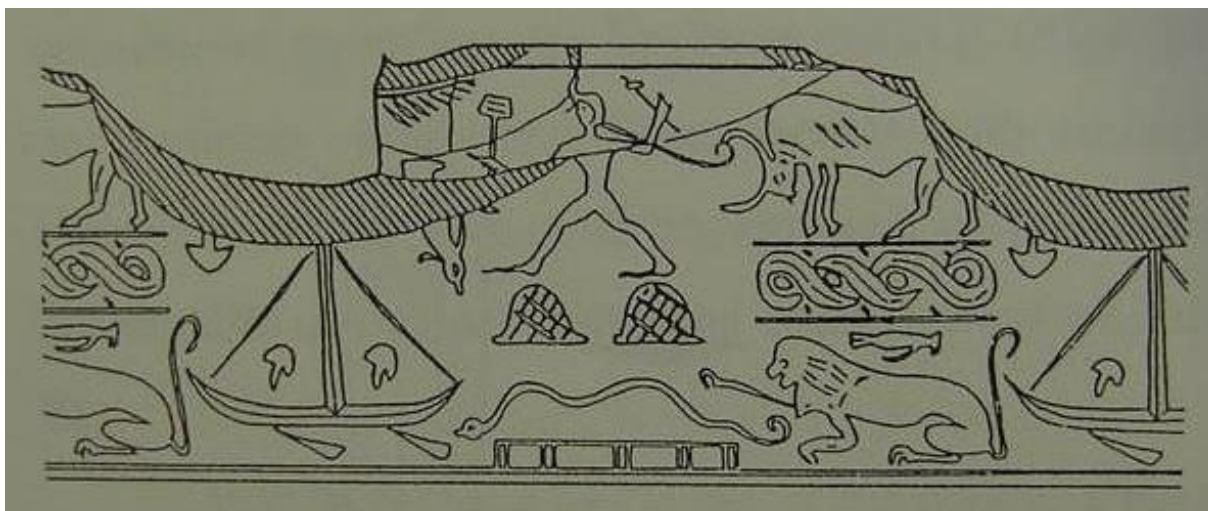
For these and more reasons, Arnold admitted, "Some have identified this statue as Joseph, the Israelite vizier of Pharaoh in the book of Genesis."⁴ One point that demands this connection is what a singular, unparalleled honour such a statue and tomb was for an Apiru/Hebrew by an Egyptian pharaoh. It is an anomaly in Egyptian history. Significantly, the body was absent from the tomb, having been removed in an act that has the mark of pious intent, suggesting the removal of Joseph's bones (Ex. 13:19).



A reconstruction of the massive statue found in the pyramid tomb (right), wearing his trademark multi-colored coat.⁵

For these reasons and more, acceptance is growing that this marks the 'early Israelite period' at Avaris.

Another point that would strengthen this connection further, and even providing evidence for the lives and identities of Joseph's other brothers and the family history *as narrated in late Genesis*, would be my own work on (The Seal of Joseph, Bar-Ron 2017)⁶ a cylinder seal impression found in the ruins of the above palace.



There, I give a thorough interpretation of the image to challenge the less parsimonious model of Bietak. When viewed through a biblical lens, the bulla clearly depicts *early symbols of the Israelite tribes*. They evoke themes found in the blessings of Jacob to his sons in Genesis chapter 49, with motifs that would have been well understood among ancient Egyptians of the early 13th Dynasty. The arrangement of the symbols indicates a strong, Joseph-centred bias. Accordingly, it seems likely that the owner of the seal, most likely the high official that owned the estate, may have been none other than the figure behind the biblical traditions of Joseph; more likely his chief heir.

The Slavery

To my reading, the Mine N inscription, Sinai 361, reads:

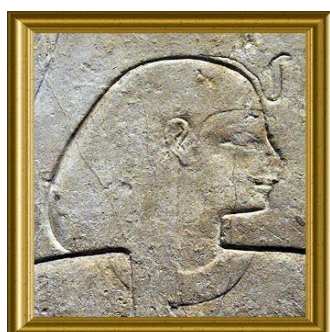
"The Enslaver has been removed" – **"זה שחבש נמש"** (Section II-D above)

What occurred next can help us appreciate that euphoric statement.

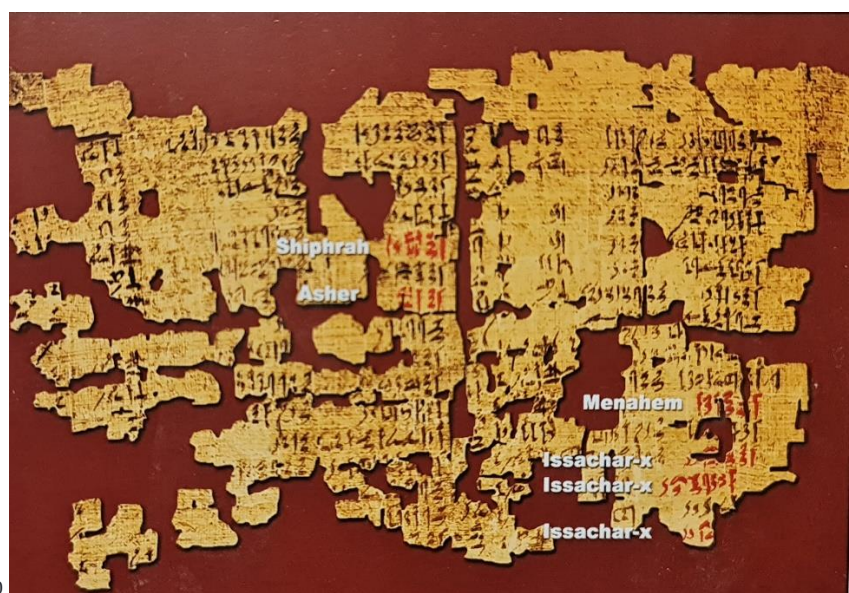
What happens after this early Israelite period – what was found in the strata of biblical Goshen, the crowded center of the Apiru/Hebrews, just *above* those corresponding to the late 12th and early 13th Dynasties – is best described in the words of David Rohl:

According to the archaeological evidence at Tell ed-Daba, conditions then began to deteriorate, with skeletal remains in the graves showing signs of malnutrition (Harris lines in the bones). Anthropological studies show that adults were dying in their early thirties. Strangely, there were more burials of infants and young children (50%) than normal (25%) for this sort of ancient civic society. Moreover, there were more females than males in the adult grave population. For every three females there were only two males. Where had all the adult males gone? The Bible provides the answer. ... the Egyptians first enslaved the Israelites, then culled the male infants because the slave population was getting too large and Pharaoh perceived this as a threat. ... this would mean increase in infant burials and a skew in the adult population in favour of females.⁸

Bones are not buried with names, letting us know what precise people these really were, but papyri from this time period do. Dated to this same late Middle Kingdom period,⁹ is the Brooklyn Papyrus, a list of domestic slaves working on an agricultural estate in Thebes. It actually contains actual Israelite names from the Exodus narrative: Shiphrah, Asher, Menahem, and the name Issachar thrice:



10



11

During this period, just as written in Exodus, the Hebrews were spread throughout the land, and by the end of the dynasty, even free-born Semites were enslaved.

The actual period of Israelite slavery seems to begin with a mid-13th Dynasty Pharaoh Sobekhotep III or one of his immediate predecessors. Dated to his reign we find the first papyri, like that housed at the Brooklyn Museum, that mention Hebrew slaves.

A usurper to the throne of native Egyptian stock, with no kinship to the royal seed of Amenemhat III – and therefore one who would have naturally felt no connection to the long-deceased vizier Ankhu – he is a clear fit for the Pharaoh who “knew not Joseph”.

The Year of Plagues

While other scholars have proposed very similar scientific reconstructions, particularly for the early plagues, here I present the Plagues 1-9 as explained by Rohl in *From Eden to Exile: The Epic History of the People of the Bible* (2003).¹² Plague 10 is explained according to my personal opinion based on other sources, a model that Rohl has expressed satisfaction with as well.¹³

Plagues 1-6 fit into a well-understood, natural cascade pattern of environmental collapse, beginning with an algal bloom. Well within the laws of nature, such an event that turn fresh, life-giving rivers into a blood-red, undrinkable poison, that kills off fish, could bring about the displacement and mass dying of riverine frogs, and the onset of mosquitos and dog flies that thrive on the rotting corpses. Anthrax plague could naturally set in, spread by the flies, causing boils or lesions before victims succumb.

As explained by David Rohl, the plagues make scientific sense as having taken place *over the course of a year* – Plague 7 (a violent hail storm with intense lightning) in winter, Plague 8 (locusts) and Plague 9 (a massive dust-cloud from the Sahara) in Spring, they sound less like myth; more like a report of real-world events.

Such details, including their movement from the south, northwards up the Nile Valley, can even explain the biblical insistence that several of the plagues were suffered by the Egyptians but spared the Hebrews. The Nile Valley acted as a narrow funnel, concentrating the force of those plagues, such that the denizens of “Upper Egypt” (mainly native Egyptians) suffered more. When those plagues reached the bastion of the Hebrews, fanning out over the flat Nile Delta, the rest of their largely-spent energy was spread out. Thus the Hebrews were largely spared the damage of the hail and lightning strikes, the locust plague was less intense for them, and the massive dust storm, driven by the *Khamseen* winds, weakened, not bringing such invisibility to the North.

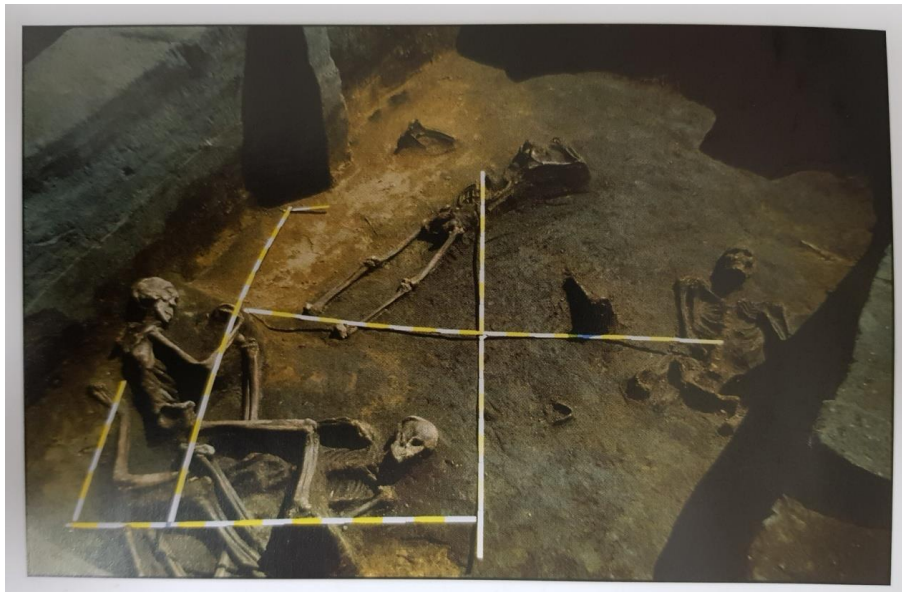
Yet, however rational, this episode could still be dismissed as little more than creative speculation, a floating, ungrounded belief, were it not for at least two dramatic remains

of *physical evidence from the Plagues* that remain: mass graves of those felled by plague (Plague Five), and evidence of the Tenth Plague itself:

Again, dating to the same general period, is physical evidence of plague, in the form of mass graves, or "death pits" in Avaris, corresponding precisely to this time-period. It was excavated by Manfred Bietak, arguably the most respected director of excavations working in Egypt in the last several decades. In David Rohl's words:

At the end of Tell ed-Daba Stratum G, several large pits have been unearthed, in which were found scores of bodies tossed in as if by some act of emergency interment... Bodies lay on top of each other, many face down. The suddenness of the calamity is obvious by the way that the bodies have been tossed into the pits. According to Manfred Bietak, these people died from a deadly and virulent plague. Professor Hans Goedicke (of Johns Hopkins University) notes that just such a plague is mentioned in papyrus documents of the era following the 13th Dynasty and, interesting from our point of view, the texts refer to it as the 'Asiatic Disease' -- in other words, a plague specifically associated with the Semitic populations of Egypt.¹⁴

Could it have been called 'Asiatic Disease' not because it affected Semites specifically, but because it was believed to have been brought on as an act of vengeance by their God, by means of their prophets, Moses and Aaron?



One of several plague pits at Avaris, with bodies heaped one on top of the other in disarray. (Austrian Archaeological Institute)¹⁵

Particularly compelling is how David Rohl demonstrates how, counting 215 years from what would have marked the entrance of Joseph in Egypt, we arrive at the reign of late 13th Dynasty Pharaoh Dudimose.

According to Artapanus (the 2nd century BCE Persian-Jewish staff scholar at the famed Library of Alexandria) and Manetho, the Israelites left Egypt during the reign **Tutimaus**. As noted by David Rohl, Immanuel Velikovsky¹⁶ and others, the only matching name that could fit even the broadest acceptable timeframe, given the many limiting factors, is

Dudimose, one of the final pharaohs of the 13th Dynasty – shortly before Egypt fell to the early Hyksos of the Second Intermediate Period.

I've discovered that both sides of scholarship – from orthodox academia to revised chronologists – agree that the Hyksos took over the region of the eastern Nile Delta, which ended Egypt's Thirteenth Dynasty of Egypt and brought about the Second Intermediate Period.

Significantly, based on linguistic evidence, the greatly important Ipuwer Papyrus is normally dated by both sides of scholarship – traditional academia and revised chronologists alike – to the 13th Dynasty, certainly no earlier than the 12th. It is scroll that reads like an eyewitness report on the events of the Exodus from an Egyptian perspective. It brings chilling references to plagues just as those of the Exodus, such as:

Papyrus 2:6 **Plague is throughout the land. Blood is everywhere.**

Papyrus 2:10 Forsooth, **the river is blood.**

There specific mentions of the suffering of animals, loss of grain, starvation from lack of food, that “gates, columns and walls are consumed by fire”, how darkness had been brought on by a terrible storm, and the looting of Egypt by slaves:

Papyrus 3:3 **Gold, blue stone, silver, carnelian, bronze and Yebet stone andare fastened to the necks of female slaves.**

One of the events Ipuwer describes is a powerful earthquake:

Papyrus 4:2

... Years of noise. There is no end to noise. (While this is written in Egyptian, *ra'ash* is the term for earthquake in biblical Hebrew)

6:1 **Oh, that the earth would cease from noise, and tumult (uproar) be no more.**

6:3 The prison is ruined. [i.e. by landslide, toppled walls]

4:3 and 5:6 'Forsooth, **the children of princes are dashed against the walls.**

6:12 Forsooth, the children of princes are cast out in the streets.

7:4 **The residence is overturned in a minute.**

This would be perfect fit for what Artapanus describes to have been the agent of the Tenth Plague: *a powerful earthquake*. While Immanuel Velikovsky was off on a number of the ideas he proposed, he seems to have been perfectly correct on this point. He wrote: ^{Ibid.}

A book by Artapanus, no longer extant, which quotes some unknown ancient source and which in its turn was quoted by Eusebius, tell of 'hail and earthquake by night [of the last plague], so that those who fled from the earthquake were killed by the hail, and those who sought shelter from the hail were destroyed by the earthquake. And at that time all the houses fell in, and most of the temples.'

Although this tradition does not seem to survive in Jewish *aggada*, there is a strong suggestion of it that survives in Samaritan-Israelite tradition. In *Memar Markeh*, the community's most honored Torah sage writes:

At midnight Shehmah [*HaShem* in Aramaic, God] slew the unclean firstborns and stone idols... At midnight Shehmah destroyed the firstborns who were offering to the destroyers [their gods]...

At midnight Shehmah destroyed the highest gods and their devoted worshippers... when the hour came, the Destroyer descended, **topped the gods**, and slew the firstborn (of Pharaoh). They looked for the Pharaoh's firstborn afterward and found him dead, their souls were shattered and their hearts in anguish when they saw him dead **and his god toppled over**".¹⁷

According to this ancient source, the "judgements" against "the gods of Egypt" meant the toppling of stone statues. That could only involve the agency of a powerful earthquake.

This is greatly significant, as find the signature of just such a great earthquake in the matching stratum at Avaris, biblical Goshen. In private discussion, Egyptologist David Rohl revealed a startling detail from the archaeology of biblical. Discussing the early Hyksos, the Semites who entered Egypt, settling in Avaris (biblical Goshen) soon after the Exodus, in the vacuum left by the escaped Israelites, he noted:

The mudbrick houses of Avaris Stratum G [what remained of Hebrew Goshen] were only really extant to their foundations. The early Hyksos literally flattened the site to build the Stratum F necropolis.

I replied noting how pointless that would have been if there were good standing structures, as Egypt was sure to boast in better times. Not to leave a single earlier structure standing would have been an enormous undertaking for the invaders. When the Israelites conquered Canaanite cities, they simply settled and renamed them. What ancient conquering nation from that period had the resources to flatten what had been a vast urban center, in order to rebuild it to their liking?

The only logical reason for flattening and rebuilding Avaris is if the remaining buildings of the abandoned population center were so badly damaged to the point of ruin, that they couldn't suit the needs of the new occupiers. There was little choice but to demolish them and rebuild it all from the foundations. David agrees with me that this constitutes compelling, indirect evidence of that a massive earthquake had devastated the area just before the Hyksos arrival. Again, that would be the time of Tutiamus/Dudimose; the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

Where the Inscriptions Fit In

I propose that it is this year of plagues, described above, to which Sinai 361 refers:

אז תמה השנה,
תם הנע לבעלת!

**Then the year ended,
[and] ended [no more] were those who strayed to Ba'alat!** (Section II-D above)

As explained above, the message refers to that year of plagues [orchestrated by their traditional Deity]. When the year of plagues [by which the Enslaver was removed] was finished, also “finished” (גָּמַל-gone, no more) were those who had strayed (“wandered” [נָּגַל-n]) – to the cult of Golden Lady, the cow-goddess Ba`alat. This was a sign-post for those who remained at Serabit el-Khadim, telling them: no more *Ba`alat*-strayers remain in Egypt proper. They were either won over to the traditional Deity of Israel’s patriarchs, or dead.

Again, it is only natural that such a cascade of disasters that rocked Egypt, particularly the word of a plague, would have kept the Semite slaves working the mines at Serabit el Khadim away, stranded at the site. The Mine L and N inscriptions seem to be evidence of the efforts by Moses and the Israelite leadership to absorb and assimilate this group, as the tribes moved through the wilderness en route to Mount Sinai.

As noted several times in the previous section II, these may well be the “mixed multitude” of Hebrews that joined the Hebrews. Still attached to the cult of Ba`alat, the Golden Cow-goddess, these Hebrews may have been the עַרְבֵי רֶבֿ – the mixed multitude that, per tradition, brought about the “Golden Calf/Heifer” incident in Exodus chapter 32 (Ex. 12:38, 32:7 see Rashi ad loc.):

לָּח וְגַם עַרְבֵי רֶבֿ עָלָה אִתָּם וְצֹאן וְבָקָר, מְאֹד מְאֹד. 38 And a mixed multitude went up also with them and flocks, and herds, very much cattle.

2. A Few Points of Defense for New and Revised Chronology: What Anchors the late 12th-13th Dynasties Down to the 17th through 15th Centuries BCE

Not only according to New Chronology of David Rohl, but also agreeable to those who subscribe to Revised Chronology and other similar chronological reconstructions, the fall of Pharaoh Dudimose – which shortly precedes the fall of the Thirteenth Dynasty and onset of the Second Intermediate Period – coincides with **1446/1447 BCE**. That is the year of the Exodus according to what appears to be the most reliable textual witness in regards to the numbers, mainly in Genesis, that yield the Torah’s tradition of chronology: LXX (the Septuagint).

A Brief Word About the Historical Importance of the LXX-Type Textual Tradition

LXX is not “merely” a translation of the Torah into *Koine* Greek produced by the Great Sanhedrin in the 3rd century BCE. The Dead Sea Scrolls and other sources reveal it to represent a dominant, sister textual tradition to the Masoretic and Samaritan. For example, in *Antiquities of the Jews*, when Second Temple kohen-priest, Josephus lists the names and lengths of the lives the pre-Abrahamic generations, his numbers reveal his textual tradition to have been an LXX-type (Book I Ch. 3:4 and 6:5).

Moreover, it is clear that the early Church, which had begun as a breakaway Jewish sect, inherited a Torah tradition with a key LXX-type textual variant. One of several points of evidence is the alleged genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3:34-38 that traces him back to Adam.

Clearly written to make an impression on the Torah-minded, it would only convince if the root generations in the genealogy were in the official, orthodox order of the day. It mentions a second Cainan between Eber and Shelah, as does LXX, Jubilees (a Hasmonean-era text), and the writings of Jewish historian Demetrius, who lived in the third century 200s BCE, the same time as the LXX translation.

Together with its far stronger agreement with SP (the Samaritan Pentateuch, including verses critical to chronology, such as Ex. 12:40) over either of their agreement with the Masoretic, this suggests that many elements of the Septuagint-type textual tradition were part of the dominant, orthodox Pharisaic text in latter Second Temple Judea.

(It is important to note that this does not make LXX “the superior” textual tradition. We dare not dismiss the importance of the Masoretic and Samaritan texts on other variants, which can prove more reliable in other aspects. There are several clues that the chronologies yielded by those textual traditions represent *sacred* chronologies, intended to yield symmetries and sacred patterns. For the faithful, it is wisest to view all three as precious resources within the broader Israelite heritage, helping us to answer more questions than any one of them, alone, could.)

Ultimately, key relevance of LXX to the chronological place of the Exodus is bolstered by points listed in this case. Unlike other proposed dates for the Exodus, *Egypt truly begins a precipitous fall in the year of its date for the Exodus, 1446/7*, such that generations of Hebrews would never again Egypt so mighty again (Ex. 14:13 cf. I Sam. 30:13).

Again, besides the inappropriate length it would add here, a full defence of New and Revised Chronology requires the work of a seasoned, historian or archaeologist of high calibre. It involves:

- exposing the problems with calibrated radiocarbon dating for early dates.
- myths about the Thera eruption during the reign of the early New Kingdom Pharaoh Ahmose I – whose conventional dates are, no surprise, more than a century off from when the eruption is dated to.
- a candid discussion about Ramesses the Great and where his period most logically belongs.
- considering genealogies, namely those of Nespaherenhat and the Memphite Dynasty
- Sothic dating
- Assyrian Chronology
- a logical exploration of what biblical textual traditions seem to be most reliable on what and where
- *and more.*

Fortunately, there are several points, from amidst a much larger case, of conclusive evidence – chronological “anchors”, so to speak – that are sufficient to give us a general picture. Points that can give us sufficient confidence to respectfully disagree with conventional dating, such that the late 12th through 13th Dynasties just happen to fit the corresponding biblical dates precisely.

Accordingly, it should be clear that the focus of academic revisionist chronology is not on “proving the Bible”. It is about a building the most parsimonious model backed by more and more highly significant evidence than any other; one that so happens not only to vindicate the biblical timeline, but to synchronize the histories of all dominant ancient cultures of the Mediterranean basin and Near East.¹⁸

1. THE YEARS OF PLENTY AND YEARS OF FAMINE

A pattern of flood height measurements recorded on the cliff face of the river gorge at the Semna fortress (see image below), dates precisely to the approximate time of the reign of Pharaoh Amenemhat III according to New Chronology: 1680-1633 BCE. This is the pharaoh for whom, again, there is strong evidence for having been the one to have raised Yoseph up to rule over Egypt as the vizier known to history as *Ankhu*.

The pattern shows a moderate rise of the water level (due to increased rains over the Ethiopian highlands), followed by a catastrophic rise of the river waters (a 30-foot increase) over several years, caused by even more intense rainfall over the sources of the Nile in Ethiopia).

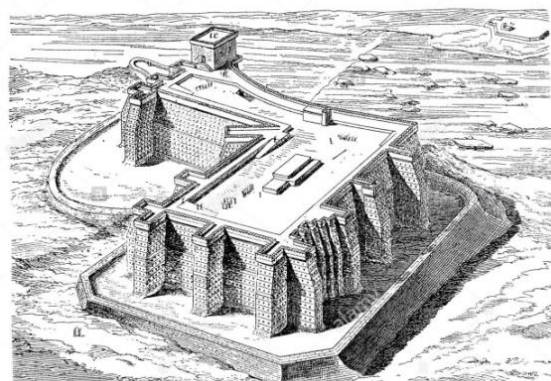
All of this can be explained as the consequences of climate change; the northward expansion of the tropical zone. It can perfectly explain the "years of plenty" in the Joseph story followed by the "years of famine: the latter being symbolically foreseen as fat, well-fed cows emerging *from the Nile*, followed by starving, emaciated cows *also* emerging *from the Nile*.¹⁹

These catastrophic inundations of the Nile, which would have brought a devastating famine, prompted the creation of the canal Bahr *Yusuf* (noted also by Diodorus Siculus²⁰). This diverted the Nile waters into the Fayoum basin.

Moreover, contemporaneous Egyptian papyrus documents provide evidence for the centralized state gathering of grain, like that ordered by Joseph in Genesis.



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Left: Cows grazing in the flood plain of the Nile. Right: The Semna fortress was built by Egyptian Twelfth-Dynasty pharaoh Sesostri III at the second Nile cataract.

2. ANCHORING DOWN THE ACCESSION DATE OF AMENEMHAT III

To record the passage of time, ancient Egyptian priests recorded the lengths of lunar months, which were always be observed to be 29 or 30 days. Due to the random pattern

of any given set of recorded month lengths, it is possible, utilizing computer astronomy software, to locate precisely when, in history, that set of month-lengths occurred.

By this means, astronomer David Lappin revealed *a sequence of 38 out of 39 lunar month lengths that were recorded in 12th Dynasty contracts*. By comparison, the same regnal years in a conventional chronological scheme only yielded 21 matches at most, which is not statistically significant.

As renowned achaeo-astronomer Peter Humer noted, anything less than 53% success rate could not possibly claim to be the correct historical date – that being no more convincing than flipping a coin.²³

By comparison, Lappin's sequence, is an incredible 97% match. After much scrutiny by experts, Lappin's data and methodology were found to be sound and solid.²⁴ Lappin himself hails this pattern as "startling" support for Rohl's New Chronology.²⁵

What this does, it it serves to anchor the accession dates Senuseret III to 1698 BCE for Amenemhat III to 1678 BCE, 20 years later. Again, this is the same pharaoh for whom we have extraordinary evidence to have been the ruler under whom the biblical Joseph – as the Vizier Ankhu – would have served.

3. ANCHORING DOWN THE GENERAL TIME PERIOD OF NEFERHOTEP I

Archaeo-astronomy also provided an indirect proof for the accession year of the mid-13th Dynasty pharaoh Neferhotep I to the throne, circa 1535 BCE:

A precise astronomical date was found for an extremely rare event observed in Babylon: *a lunar eclipse occurred on February 25, 1362 BCE followed by a solar eclipse only 14 days later, on March 12th*. Since these event were interpreted by astronomer-priests to presage the fall of Babylon, which occurred the same year, we can determine, thanks to the Babylonian King List, that Hammurabi rose to the throne circa 1560 BCE.

Accordingly, Hammurabi conquered the city of Mari and destroyed the its royal palace, that of Zimrilin circa 1526 BCE. The excavation of its remains by archaeologist André Parrot yielded an inventory of gifts to King Zimrilin from local rulers, including a gold cup gifted him by King Yantin Ammu of Byblos (ancient Gubla, modern Gebeil). That Levantine ruler happens to have been a loyal subject to Pharaoh Neferhotep I, providing Egypt with cedar-wood from Lebanon. According to this web or relationships, David Rohl logically ties Neferhotep I to circa 1535 BCE.²⁶



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Statue of Neferhotep I from the Faiyum, Archaeological Museum of Bologna

What is deeply significant for us, is that Neferhotep is the elder brother of Khaneferre Sobekhotep IV – during whose reign Moses would have been born. One point among many is that multiple ancient sources bring the legend that, before he fled Egypt, young Prince Moses was the Egyptian general who put down a massive Kushite invasion. Indeed, besides other evidence, a stela found at Karnak records just such a war against the Kushites during the reign of Sobekhotep IV. Josephus mentions it as well, that it reached as far as Memphis and threatened to bring down the entire kingdom.

(Antiquities Book II Ch. 10 1:2:240)

4. ANCHORING DOWN THE ECLIPSE OF JOSHUA

Studying NASA records, my esteemed Israeli colleague Eli Gurevich found a total solar eclipse occurs *precisely 40 years* after the Septuagint and New Chronology date for the Exodus. Without going into details, this would have provided precisely the heavenly spectacle during the Conquest of the Land poetically described in Joshua 10:12-14: the sun and moon "standing still" together from Gibeon and Ayalon. The zone of totality passed just north of Canaan on July 14, 1406 BCE.³⁰



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Photo credit: M. Druckmüller / P. Aniol / K. Delcourte / P. Horálek / L. Calçada (ESO). In Carter, Jamie. *It's Less Than 100 Days Until the Next Total Solar Eclipse*. March 25, 2019. Sky and Telescope. Web. Retrieved April 10, 2019.

IV. WHO WROTE THEM?

TWO OR THREE SCRIBES, *ONE SINGLE COMPOSER*

Now that we have hopefully earned confidence in (a) readings for the four P-S inscriptions that happen to suggest an Exodus context, (b) that they date to a general timeframe that would be appropriate for the Exodus, and (c) that just such a dramatic episode with all the key elements of the biblical Exodus indeed occurred, we can finally treat the question of who wrote them.

The Scribes

In the graph below, a side-by-side analysis of the *core* inscriptions of Sinai 353, 349, 357, and 361 (not including the additional script added below 357, the “approbation” by a third scribe), *the first three* of the four, all those found at Mine L, show such a similar handwriting, they are most likely the work of a single hand. This is certainly the case for 353 and 357, which are also both read top-down.



















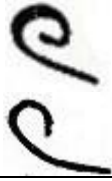






Despite the matching glyph style, Sinai 349 was written from right to left. This might not be greatly significant, considering the points of interconnectedness 349 shares with the others. Just as in Egyptian hieroglyphs, Proto-Sinaitic could be written in any direction the author wished: right-to-left, left-to-right, top-down, even *boustrophedon*, in a circular line (see Sinai 375a in Section VII below). One knows in which direction to read according to the orientation of the glyphs with animal faces. A scribe could choose to write differently according to the space afforded by where he was writing. Moreover, any slight discrepancies in lettering could be a function of the different rock surfaces.

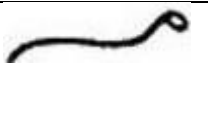










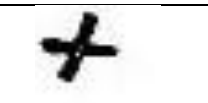

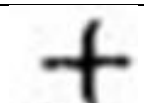

Only Sinai 361, found at Mine N, a short walk from Mine L, was clearly written in *a very distinct hand*. A scribe who uses a distinct glyph for *ḥet*, and orders his columns from right to left; not left to right.

Nonetheless, as explained above the presentations of the inscriptions, we find precisely the same biblical writing style between Sinai 357’s main column and 361, and *all four* core inscriptions exhibit the same common “Mosaic” or “Exodus” themes, expressing the same aggressive polemical thrust, all seeming to include rhymes and a distinctly Israelite, prophetic flare.

In summary, there appears to be more than one scribe writing *the words of a single author*, most likely the words of a powerful, charismatic priestly leader: one hand definitely between Sinai 353 and 357 (besides the brief, approbation by *Arba’* at the base [see Section II-C]), *possibly* a second hand behind Sinai 349 but, and a second or third hand behind Sinai 361 without question.

Letter Comparison Chart of the Four Inscriptions

Letter Name	Sinai 353 ¹ (Mine L)	Sinai 349 ² (Mine L)	Sinai 357 ³ (Mine L)	Sinai 361 ⁴ (Mine N)
א-aleph				
As explained, the direction of the script was not set, and a scribe could use different ones, according to the placement of the inscribed stone and the space he had to work with.				
ב-beth				
ה-heh				
ז-zan				
ח-heth				
Note the nearly identical glyphs in Sinai 353 and 349, vis a vis the entirely different glyph for ח-heth in 361. The latter was clearly inscribed by a distinct hand. The apparent absense of the dot in 349 has no significance, as it is a tiny, slight feature that can easily disappear with weathering.				
כ-kaph				
Due to the unclarity of the glyph (note the hatching marks, indicating damage to the stone), the “stem” of the כ-kaph of 357 in the <i>Beit Arie</i> rendering should not be taken seriously. No other source includes it. Neither the observation that the two in 357 seem to have different numbers of fingers. What we can be confident of is how, both in 349 and 357 and 349, the different instances of כ-kaph are hand-like, with straight, extended fingers and a rounded palm underneath.				
ל-lamed				
מ-mem				

𐤊-nun				
𐤍-`ayin				
One should not count a hollow dot versus the a solid as any difference at all; the represent precisely the same feature on the stone. Again, even the apparent absense of one is of no consequence. It likely disappeared.				
𐤑-shin				
𐤓-tau				

SOURCES

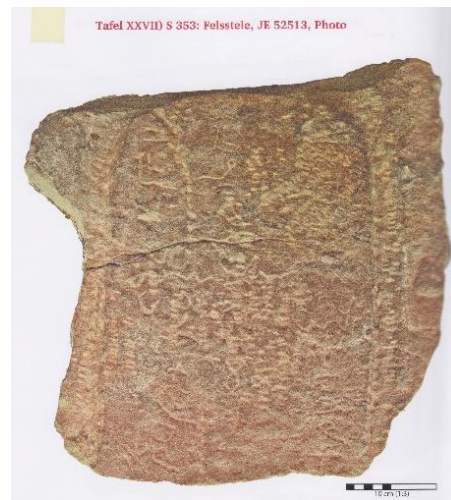
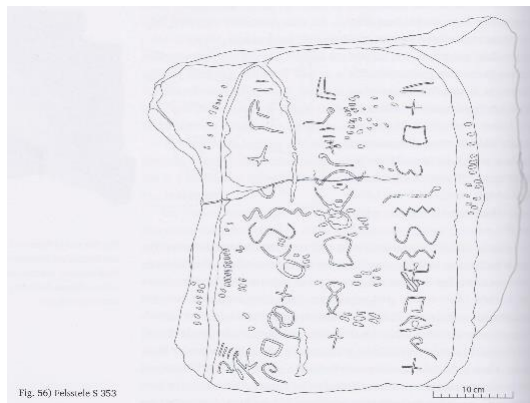
- From the drawing of Christopher Rollston of Wadi el-Hol Inscription 1.
Christopher Rollston. *The Probable Inventors of the First Alphabet: Semites Functioning as rather High Status Personnel in a Component of the Egyptian Apparatus*. August 28, 2010. Rollston Epigraphy. Web. Retrieved Sep. 27, 2020.
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The Composer

We propose that the P-S inscriptions Sinai 353, 349, 357, and 361 (not including additional script appended later) had a common composer to them all. Who could this individual have been have been?

Whoever he was, as can be seen from the deep analyses of the inscriptions in Section II, the following can be said with a degree of confidence:

1. Aside from Sinai 357, the composer had his messages **inscribed on stone tablets**, at least one of which is broken. Like the biblical Moses.



Sinai 353: a tablet of hewn stone ¹

2. The composer's messages all seem to include rhymes; **they could be expressed as songs**. Besides the Ten Commandments, perhaps no words attributed to Moses are more memorable than שירת הים-Song of the Sea (Ex. 15:1-18).
3. No personal names are mentioned in the message, let alone the composer's name or identity. This suggests great humility, one of the traits attributed to Moses. (Num. 12:3)
4. As demonstrated above in Section III-A, the composer had these messages written **at an appropriate time period for the Exodus** according to any widely-accepted theory – be that the high date in the Middle Kingdom Period, or a lower date in the New Kingdom Period. That is because the script represents a clear, intermediary stage in between the earliest Proto-Sinaitic script, which is widely agreed upon to appear during reign of Pharaoh Amenemhat III, and those of Middle-Bronze Age Canaan. It should be added that, at this general time period, literacy was high among Semites sojourning in Egypt.
5. The composer had them written in the Sinai Desert, the region of the Israelite Exodus wanderings. More specifically, it was **at a well-known hub of Semite slave activity at the general time period of the Exodus**, Serabit el-Khadim. In particular, it is confidently identified with or nearby the specific locales mentioned in the Book of Exodus where Moses struggled with the Israelites over the manna (see Addendum below) the Golden Calf cult (see Introduction), and where Moses delivered inscribed teachings on stone.
6. This all takes place in an area of the Sinai **where there had been a Kenite presence for centuries**, that of the tribe of Jethro and Hobab – a name etched on a stone cliff in the environs. (Gerster No. 1, see Section V below)

7. The work represents **the vision and words of a single, powerful ideological leader; a priestly chieftain:** Whereas the inscriptions exhibit the same powerful religious ideology, common themes, a single common polemical thrust, and a common writing style, and three (those found at Mine L) seem to be the work of a single hand, the one at Mine N (Sinai 361) is clearly written in a distinct hand. In short, there is more than one scribe writing the words of a single composer, suggesting the role of a priestly chieftain.

Moreover, one of these powerful inscriptions (Sinai 357) seems to have an approbation written beneath it. It is written in the very distinct hand of a *third* individual, most likely by a subservient person of authority, whose affirmation carried weight.

8. The composer not only seems to **make references to all the Exodus elements** mentioned in point 3 in the inscriptions, but even *to the very Exodus itself*: the fall of a powerful “Enslaver”, and “the year”, which I interpret to be the year of turmoil remembered the “Ten Plagues”.
9. Most salient and repetitious is the composer’s expression of a deep, **polemical disgust for the Cult of Ba`alat**, the Golden Cow deity of the Semites (353, 349, 361), which we’ve demonstrated to be the one and the same as the “Golden Calf”. The inscriptions repudiate it and its worshippers in different ways, employing biblical terminology of divine outrage and curse as found in early biblical writings. This would be only too appropriate for the biblical Moses; it is the very attitude the narrative gives him.
10. Besides the proposed content of the messages themselves, the specific, parallel biblical wordings, the verb forms and usage of tense (archaic, found in the oldest books of the Bible) give the composer **a uniquely-Israelite, prophetic flare**. It suggests the work of an ancient Israelite prophet.

The above points present strong grounds for the possibility that these inscriptions are the words of a historical Moses, and for Sinai 353, 357 and 349 being the work of his very own hand.

Yet, with full respect to the evidence and startling patterns of evidence for the Sojourn, Slavery and Exodus mentioned in Section III, what reliable historical evidence is there for a historical Moses to begin with; what outside ancient sources?

Firstly, Section III-C brought a several highlights among the synchronisms between the events the 13th Dynasty and the Exodus, including the greatly important put-down of the Kushite invasion, attributed to Sobekhotep IV – a victory hailed in several ancient sources as being owed to Prince Moses.

Yet we glossed over a number of points of evidence that indicate Moses to have been none other than Sobekhotep *Mio*, the adopted crown prince of the Khaneferre

Sobekhotep IV.² (That his common name was Mio corresponds to how Josephus explains the break-up of his name as “*Mo* and *Uses*”.³) The child Sobekotep *Mio* appears with his “father” in two early stela as Sob. IV’s crown prince, one in Wadi Hammamat; the other Wadi el-Hudi.² Yet he not only does not succeed his powerful father; he disappears entirely, and there is no known grave.

Also important to note is that both a historical Moses and Israelite Exodus are mentioned in a non-Jewish source by Hecataeus of Abdera as early as the 4th century BCE.⁴ This is one full century before the Septuagint was written in Alexandria.⁵ Other references include the 3rd century BCE scholars Apartanus and Manetho.

Considering Hecataeus’ branding Jewish ways a “misanthropic and inhospitable way of life”⁴ and his odd rendering of biblical events, it is clear that the philosopher was neither aiming to please a Jewish audience nor was he under their influence. He had learned from Egyptian traditions from when he had visited Thebes and composed a history of Egypt.⁶ According to Apartanus, the Egyptian memory of Moses stretched back centuries, leaving indelible imprints on Egyptian religion. These include the rise of the Apis bull cult, the ibis becoming “the sacred guardian spirit of the city” of Hermopolis, and the introduction of circumcision.⁷

Yet, there may be an actual written reference to an the activity of Moses *from his time*, in the Ipuwer Papyrus, which again, is dated by most scholars to this period. Of Moses, we find in Exodus 4:9:

<p>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לוֹ עוֹד... וְלָקַחְתָּ מִמַּיְמֵי הַיָּאֵר וְשָׁפַכְתָּ הַיַּבֶּשֶׁה, וְהָיָה הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר תִּקַּח מִן הַיָּאֵר וְהָיָה לְדָם עַל הַיַּבֶּשֶׁה.</p>	<p>[YHWH further said to him] ... you shall take of the water of the Nile and pour it upon the ground, and the water you have taken from the river will become blood upon the dry land.</p>
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In the words of Ipuwer, among the uncanny parallels with specific details of the Plagues episode in the biblical narrative (see Section III-C above), we find:⁸

Papyrus 7:4 Behold Egypt is poured out like water. **He who poured water on the ground, he has captured the strong man in misery.**

Rohl brings the translation thus:

“Behold **Egypt has fallen to the pouring water**. And he who poured water upon the ground seizes the mighty in misery.”⁹

Could the Egyptian sage be lamenting with lament and disdain, how Egypt had fallen before Moses (whom he cannot even bring himself to name), the figure who had publicly poured water on the ground as a sign of the woe to come? That he had siezed the upper hand in his struggle against “the mighty” pharaoh – the heretofore “strong man”?

I can only hope that the reader can appreciate that the case for Moses being a true, historical individual is a far more compelling one than the null hypohthesis. The Exodus narrative has been demonstrated to convey a strong core of genuine history, albeit in just the way such a sacred history would have been told effectively in that culture: with an

emphasis on symmetry, the use of hyperbole, Semitic exaggeration, and the use of sacred numbers. Those aspects are peripheral to the core and do not interfere with the essential narrative, which is well borne out by the evidence.

As such, the notion of Moses as the composer of these Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions is not cold speculation. It is a reasonable, even probable.

After careful consideration of the case brought here and future research, scholars may one day even consider Sinai 353, 349, 357, 361, supported by the other inscriptions discussed here, to be among the stronger points of evidence for his life and career.



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V. CEMENTING THE EXODUS CONNECTION: THE BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SERABIT EL-KHADIM AND THE “HOBAB INSCRIPTION”

After making a broad case for certain Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions actually being the work of a historical Moses and his entourage at the time of a historical biblical Exodus of Semites from Egypt, we can now proceed more confidently in tightening the Exodus context for the inscriptions further.

It seems we have only begun to uncover the significance of Serabit el-Khadim to the Exodus story.

A. EXODUS CAMP FIVE OR THE REGION OF *MOUNT SINAI ITSELF*?

As explained above, Sinai 361 found at Mine N makes profound sense as referring to “the year” of plagues (see Section III-C above). We reasonably propose that Israelites and other Semites were left behind there, at the mines by the Temple of Golden Cow Deity Ba`alat. The Mine L and N inscriptions seem to be evidence of the efforts by Moses and the Israelite leadership to absorb and assimilate these Israelites, en route to Mount Sinai.

The question is, does this depend on a particular Exodus route? In short, none of those that are biblically and scientifically tenable; those of the Sinai Desert region.

Due to how utterly untenable any proposal is for Mount Sinai in present-day Saudi Arabia (requiring a deep-sea crossing and the traversing of vast distances in trips of a few days), and my personal difficulties with the proposals of *HaShem El Tarif* and *Har Kharkom*¹ – well beyond the scope of this large paper – I am focusing here on the other Sinai Desert candidates.

In fact, the strength of an argument for an Exodus connection to these inscriptions is bolstered by the fact that the precise location of Serabit el-Khadim would have great Exodus significance in not *one*, but *at least two* competing proposals for the Exodus route.

First, it works impressively as the Fifth Encampment after the Red Sea Crossing en route to a route to Mount Sinai in the deep southern reaches of the peninsula (most likely Jebel Safsafa). As such, it fits like a perfectly-made puzzle piece in the wider context of place-names preserved in the Sinai Desert, precisely in the order recorded in the biblical narrative.

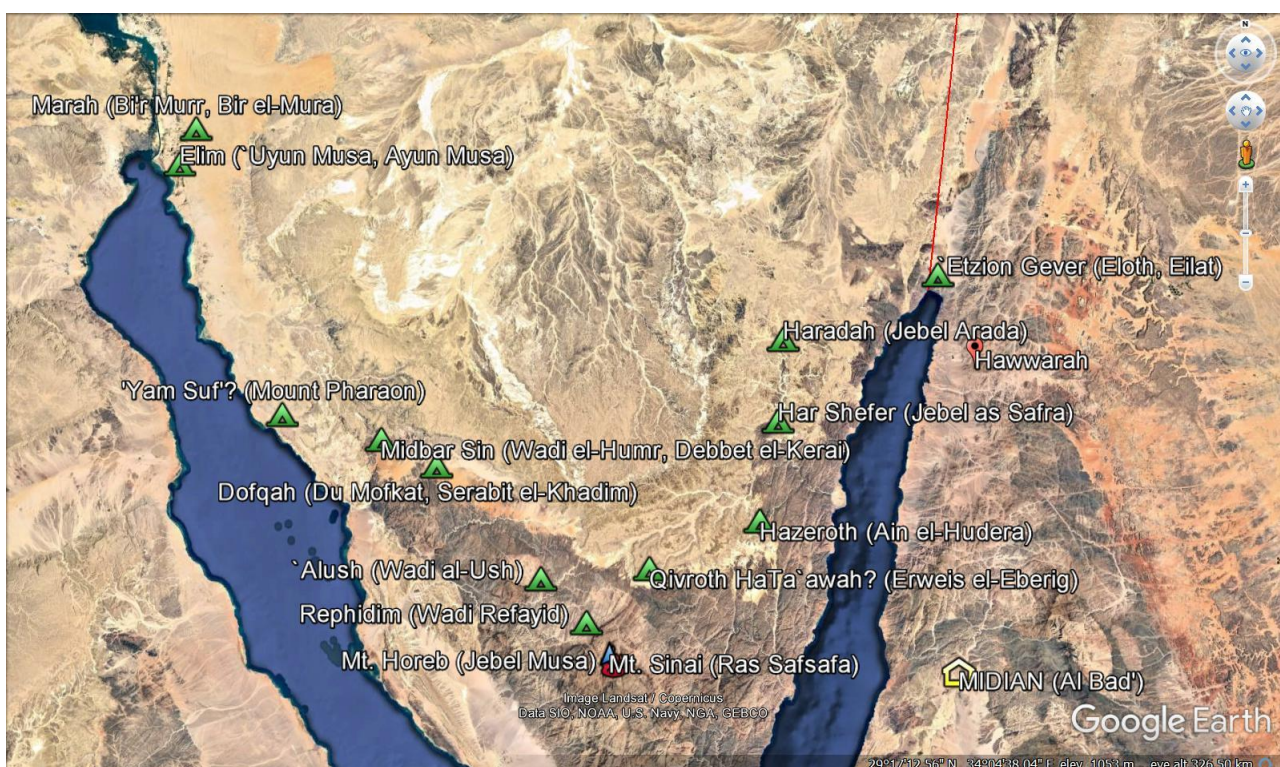
Alternatively, however, there are powerful reasons why Serabit el-Khadim may best be understood as the hidden backdrop for the scene of the Golden Calf incident itself, no more than day and a half’s journey from the double peaked Mount Sinai and Horeb itself.

A. SERABIT EL-KHADIM AS CAMP FIVE, BIBLICAL *DOFQAH*

As explained above at length, all the inscriptions treated here were found at Serabit el-Khadim ("Cavern of the Slaves"). The site is known to be the ancient Egyptian site where slaves toiled to mine turquoise over centuries.

World-class Egyptologist David Rohl,² following and Dr. Edward Robinson and Eli Smith³ and other Egyptologists and biblical historians, notes that **Du Mofka**(t) –the ancient Egyptian name for the plateau site of Serabit el-Khadim, meaning “Mountain of Turquoise” or “Copper” (see below)– seems to preserve the ancient toponym **Dofqah**.

It would therefore be one and the same as the fifth encampment of the Israelites in their flight from Egypt en route to Mt. Sinai (Num. 33:12).

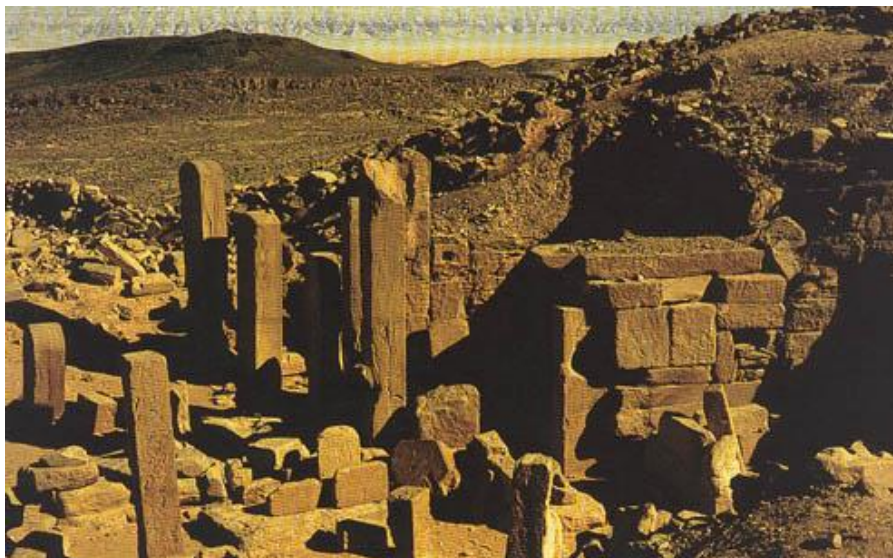


Dofqah (Du-Mofkat), is the fifth encampment of the marching Israelites in the Sinai Desert.⁴ Below is a closer image of its environs.

Here is a list of the traditional place-names, preserved in the Sinai Desert for countless generations, that seem to preserve the biblical toponyms for the encampments. Note how, they form a clear route, following the precise order of encampments recorded in the biblical narrative:

- **Marah** = Bir el-**Mura** (Bir is be'er in Hebrew, meaning "well")
- **Elim** = Ayun Musa (Ayun is `ain in Hebrew, meaning "well", Musa is Arabic for Moshe/Moses)
- **Dofqah** = **Du Mofqa**(t)
- **`Alush** = Wadi **al-Ush**)

- **Rephidim** ("-im" denotes the plural form in Hebrew) = Wadi **Refayid** (the final -d denotes the plural form in Arabic)
- **Hašeroth** = Ain el-**Hudera** (again, "ain" means "well" and ʔ (d) interchanges with ʕ (zadi) between Semitic languages)
- **Har Shefer** = Jebel as **Safra** (*Sh* and *S* are the same letter in Hebrew)



Archaeological site of the mines of Serabit-el-Khadim⁶

An array of key scholars agree⁷ that such a mine complex, surely known to the Sinai-grazing shepherd Moses (see Section VI on the historicity of Moses), would have been a critical site for his people to utilize:

If the Israelites were to forge the weapons they would need for the conquest of Canaan and accoutrements to create the Tabernacle, such mines would have been invaluable.

While the site is famous for its turquoise mine, it is arguably even more famous for its copper mines. Despite a later, revised translation by Egyptologists, B. Rothenberg et al. defends the older translation of *mafkat*, the source of the Egyptian name "Du-Mofka(t)", as copper.⁸

This is not to mention the formidable strength of the greater geographical context for the Du-Mofka(t)-Dofqah equation: the collective topographical and phonetic evidence for the identification of the encampments *before and after* it (such as Wadi **al-Ush** preserving the biblical toponym for the sixth encampment **`Alush**, and Wadi **al-Refayid** preserving **Refidim**, the placename for Israel's seventh station), as they are listed in Num. 33,11-14.

The identification is further bolstered by what had just occurred at the *previous* encampment, according to the biblical narrative, station four en route to Mt. Sinai, *Midbar Sin* – the Wilderness of Sin. Identified as Wadi el-Humr (see maps on page 3) by Robinson and Smith, Rohl, and others, it is only 10 miles/16 kilometers from Dofqah. According to Exodus 16, it is there at *Midbar Sin* where the Israelites first encountered manna.

As noted in Section II-D and further explained in the Addendum (see below), my initial this is greatly significant this is, considering what is arguably the strongest scholarly candidate for the earthly identification of biblical manna – a continuing, "this world" phenomenon: the crystallized honeydew of scale insects, particularly that of *Trabutina mannipara*, the Tamarisk manna scale. Until this day, Wadi el-Humr is notable for its abundance of tamarisk trees.

My initial concept papers on Sinai 357 and 361 not only expounded on the real-world manna phenomenon, but presented the case that Dofqah was not only a brief stop for the freed Israelites en route to Sinai, but could well have been utilized by the new nation *throughout the first year of the Exodus*, provides the necessary context to explain the now-decoded P-S inscription at Mine N on the Serabit el-Khadim mountain plateau.

Nonetheless, there is another model that may fit the wider picture even more cleanly.

B. SERABIT EL-KHADIM AS A NEIGHBOR OF MOUNT SINAI

Why Challenge Perfection?

It may seem obtuse to question my own successful paradigm and that of a mentor, which boasts such a biblically-perfect pattern of encampments detailed above, even if just to open our minds to another tantalizing possibility. Nonetheless, we must bear in mind:

Traditional Mount Sinai has been a strong bastion for the Catholic Church for some 15 centuries. Saint Catherine's Monastery was founded in 527. For those devout souls who had made the Sinai Peninsula their home over such a long period, having a deep, unquestioned belief in Jebel Safsafa (or the neighboring Mounts Katerina and Serbal) as

Mount Sinai, it is not at all unlikely that various places in the wider region could have come to be associated with those biblical encampments and called by those names.

The name-places, most of which could well be less than 1500 years old, all do serve to complete a picture of the Exodus from a perspective of Horeb in the southern-most reaches of the peninsula.

There is a strong exception: considering all the points explained above, bias and coincidence *cannot* well account for the strong identification for Du-Mofkat as *Dofqah*.

Nonetheless, could Du-Mofkat still have been that fifth encampment of Dofqah in an alternate Exodus route that contained more circling than otherwise assumed? While I would not let go of Du-Mofkat as my preference, Walter R. Mattfeld raises the possibility that Dofqah might be Wadi Dafari or Qattar Dafari.⁹ It is Mattfeld who, in private conversation, first intrigued me to the profound model I now present.

The “Elephants in the Room” that Trumpet

Arguably the strongest point suggesting the inscriptions’ connection to the Exodus could be two no longer silent “elephants in the room”: the twin mounts Sinai and Horeb might neighbors of Serabit; not more than a long day’s hike; a day and a half for the “exodusing” Hebrews. At a location past *Wadi el-Humr*, the first large stand of tamarisk trees when journeying from the north (see Addendum), so the community would not have lacked *manna*. Even if it means losing a part, but not all of the spectacular trail of encampments outlined above, we cannot ignore this possibility... in fewest words: Jebel **Saniyah** and Jebel **Ghoriba**.

These names for two twin mounts very close to Serabit el Khadim sound astonishingly like “Sinai” and “Horeb”. In fact, the *Gh* of Ghoriba (the voiced uvular fricative “4”) and *H* of Horeb (the voiceless pharyngeal fricative “ħ”) are such similar throat consonants, they are *next to one another* on the IPA chart.

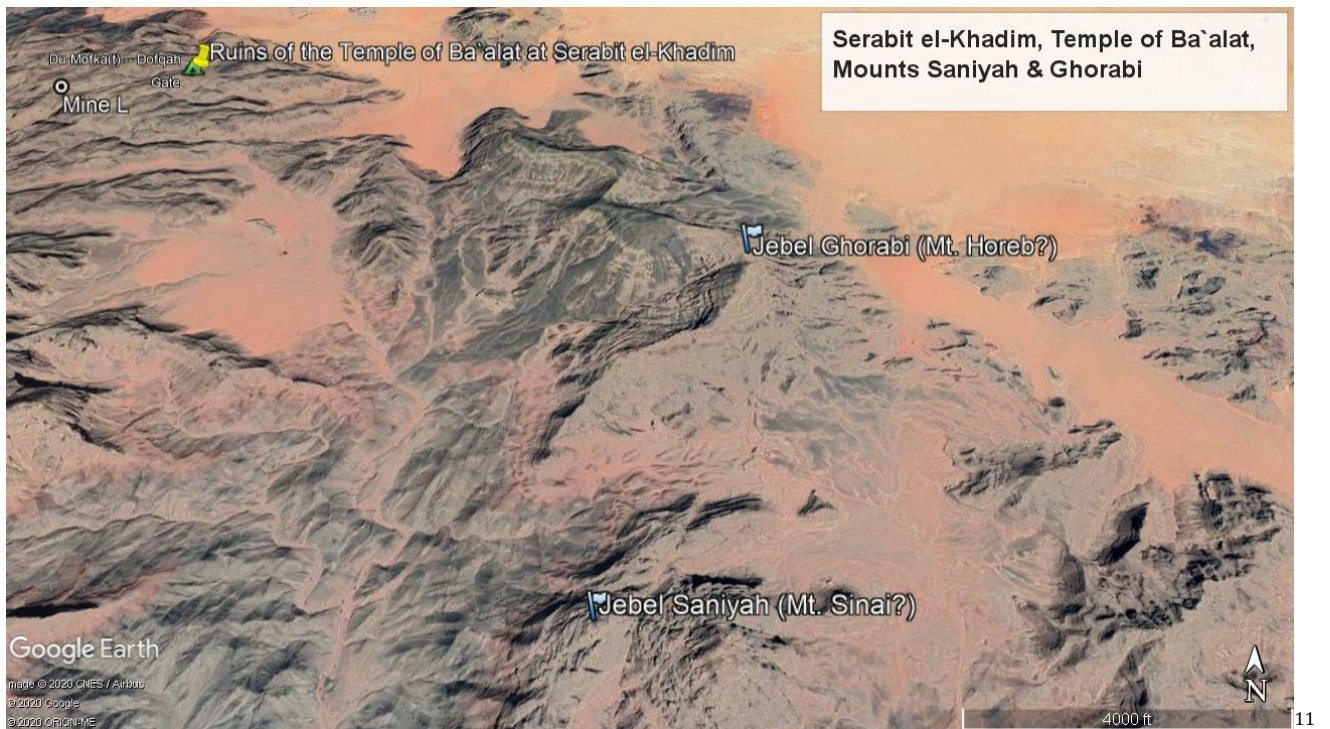
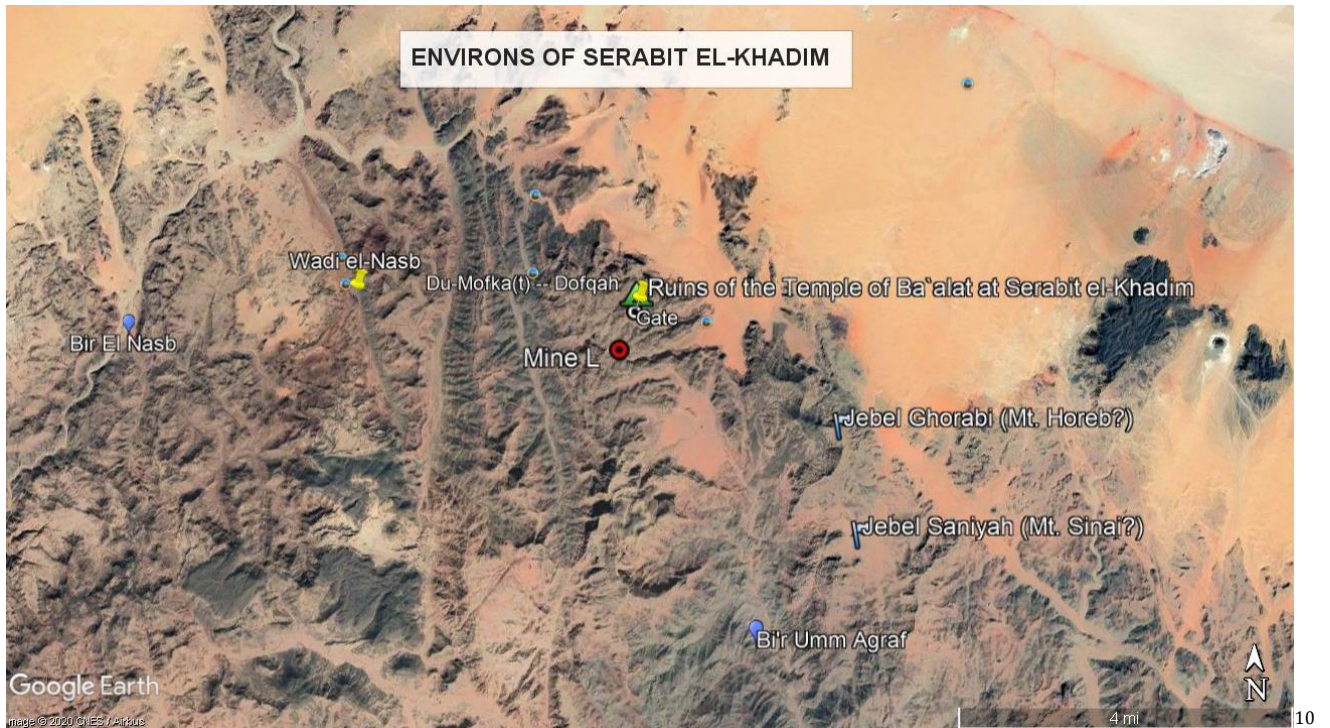
Right or wrong, of three things there can be little debate:

- Whoever named them thus in antiquity clearly intended the names of the very double-mount of biblical tradition.
- What sets it apart from the more southerly candidates is that a Mount Sinai next to Serabit el-Khadim serves no one’s bias. It supports the tradition of no Christian, Jewish, or Muslim group known to history.
- It would provide powerful context for the Torah narrative:

The site is in close proximity to the bastion of the cult known to the Torah as the Golden Calf, the Hathor Temple (Ba’alat). The Torah mentions a major struggle against the cult as occurring at the foot of Mount Sinai (Ex. 32:1). While no vestige of the cult has been found further south, Mounts Saniyah and Ghoriba are not far from where our Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions were discovered. Inscriptions that give

voice to the aggressive polemical struggle against that cult. *Not more than a day, or day-and-a-half journey by foot.*

- Contrary to all we find in the wider environs of Saniyah and Ghoriba, there is a lack of any vestige of Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions or other cultural remains, Semitic or native Egyptian, in the environs of the southernmost candidates for Mount Sinai.



Other points that would suggest *Saniyah* and *Ghoriba* as Sinai and Horeb are

- a point from the Exodus narrative,
- two oral traditions, on Jewish, the other Samaritan,
- a powerful Proto-Sinaitic inscription found nearby.

Why Would Aaron Have Been Heading Towards Moses at Mount Sinai?

In the Exodus narrative, there is an unexplained coincidence, that the text does *not* attribute to prophetic knowledge. At the time when Moses is set to leave Mount Sinai to carry out his mission in Egypt, Aaron, brother of Moses, happens to be setting out in that very direction towards where Moses is shepherding:

יד וַיַּחַר אֵף יְהוָה בְּמֹשֶׁה, וַיֹּאמֶר 14 And the anger of YHWH was kindled against Moses,
הֲלֹא אֶהְרֶן אֶחָיִךְ הַלֵּוִי? וְדַעְתִּי כִּי and He said, 'Is there not Aaron thy brother the Levite? I
דָּבָר וְדִבֵּר הוּא, וְגַם הֵנָּה הוּא לִצֵּא know that he can speak well. Also, behold, he is departing
לִקְרֹאֲתֶךָ, וְרָאִךְ וְשָׂמַח בְּלִבּוֹ. in your direction, and when he sees you he will be truly
glad. (Ex. 14: 4)

Why would Aaron the Levite be starting out in the direction of Mount Sinai, if he were not actually headed towards a major Hebrew slave labor site nearby, as we know *Serabit el-Khadim* to have been? Could this, together with:

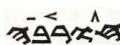
- the choice of Moses over Aaron as the savior (*note the Divine silence at Moses' question in Ex. 3:11*),
- the Divine anger expressed at the need for Aaron's involvement (Ibid. 4:13),
- Aaron's role in creating the Golden idol (32:4, 32:35),
- the memory of his disgrace being immortalized in the rite of *Parah Adumah* – the "Red Cow" (as explained in the Introduction),

Could all of these add up to suggest that Aaron's early Levitical role during the period of slavery period may have included ministering to the Ba'alat-worshipping Hebrews at Serabit el-Khadim – adding fuel to the rebellion of Korah and questions over Aaron's worthiness to serve as High Priest? It would actually suggest that, beyond the natural choice of Aaron as the founding father of Israel's priesthood (considering his relationship and service to Moses and priestly experience), he would have served an additional role in that capacity: that of an example of the ultimate penitent.

Aggadic Traditions Regarding Mount Sinai

That Sinai and Horeb were not towering peaks but relatively low, and *separate*, twin mounts, with a small but respectable amount of space between them, are aggadic traditions preserved by both Jewish and Samaritan Israelites.

In a Samaritan tradition, it was *between the two mounts* that the nation's offerings were given. According to the 11th-century Samaritan-Israelite commentator for Tyre, Abu'l-Hasan as-Suri, the "Covenant Between the Pieces" in Genesis chapter 15 foreshadows the second Passover of the Israelites, the first Passover of the Exodus journey (Num. 9:1-5): Parallel to how, in Abraham's prophetic vision, smoke and a flaming torch passed between the half-sections of the sacrificial animals he had halved, so the Israelites' Passover sacrifices were offered *between* two parts: the mounts of Sinai and Horeb.¹²

Significantly, the very name for Horeb in Samaritan-Israelite Hebrew, without the initial “H” (whose pronunciation was lost to the community) is *_Ouriba*:  Add in the lost consonant, and you have an essentially perfect preservation of Ghoriba: *[H]ouriba*.

It would also support the Jewish legend (*aggadah*) that Mount Sinai was not a tall mountain, but of lesser stature than any of the great mountains mentioned in Scripture:

R. Natan said: Since the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to give the Torah to Israel, Carmel came from Aspamia and Tavor from Beit Eilim... This one said: I was called Mount Tavor. It would be fitting for the *Shekhina* [Divine Presence] to rest upon me, for I am higher than all the other mountains, and the waters of the flood did not come down on me. And this one said: I was called Mount Carmel. It would be fitting for the *Shekhina* to rest upon me, because I was placed in the middle, and they crossed the sea over me. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: You have already been disqualified before Me because of your haughtiness! You are all disqualified before Me... I desire nothing but Sinai, which is lower than all of you... (*Midrash Tehillim* 68)¹³

How This Contributes to Our Understanding of the Inscriptions

What we gain from this is that Serabit el-Khadim seems to have been the backdrop of Mount Sinai itself; within eyeshot. This serves to strengthen our impression that our Exodus Inscriptions cannot be divorced from the Levitical purge of the Golden Calf cult that culminated in the awful struggle that took place “at the foot of Mount Sinai”, told in Exodus chapter 32. Even if they were written and left there at Serabit long before or afterwards, they are remnants of that wider purge. Tokens of the efforts by the journeying Israelites not only to absorb a “mixed multitude” of stranded Hebrew slaves into their midst, but to stamp out their sex cult and reform them to the mores of the patriarchal faith rejuvenated by Moses.

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GERSTER No. 1 (SINAI 376), THE “HOBAB INSCRIPTION”

Perhaps no element stands to strengthen this tightening of these inscriptions to the Exodus more than a Proto-Sinaitic inscription not discussed until now: Gerster No. 1, also known as Sinai 376. It provides evidence of the most essential keys to the story: *the Kenites*.

For Mt. Sinai and Horeb to truly be there, within eyeshot of Serabit el-Khadim, we would need evidence that the Kenites, the clan of Jethro and Hobab, those who brought in Moses, to indeed have had a historical presence there. Especially if they were, as we’ve long proposed, helping the Israelites to forge weapons during the nearly year-long encampment at Mount Sinai.

Not on any stone tablet, but on a rocky cliff face at Wadi el-Nasb, in close proximity to Serabit el-Khadim (and Mounts Saniyah and Ghoriba), is this Proto-Sinaitic message inscribed. It was translated by the William H. Shea,¹⁴ and my own careful analysis of the glyphs confirms his reading. It actually mentions a “Hobab”, the very name of Moses’

Midianite brother-in-law, “a congregation”, and a “mighty furnace” for smelting – the ancient art of the biblical Kenites.

Line 1 - **"And for the congregation**

Line 2 - **and Ḥobab,**

Line 3 - **a mighty**

Line 4 - **furnace."**

After a most careful, critical analysis and attempt to create an independent translation, I can only offer my wholehearted approbation to Shea's reading and interpretation. Reading it all in one statement, we have: "And for the congregation and for Ḥobab, a mighty furnace."

My Earlier Position: Mention of Biblical Ḥobab

On one hand, this could well be interpreted, quite simply, as direct, hard evidence of the biblical Ḥobab, who was lauded for being the “eyes” for the People of Israel in the desert. I proposed this position of David Rohl's and mine in my early paper on Sinai 361 at Mine N, in order to help support an earlier reading – one I can no longer support.

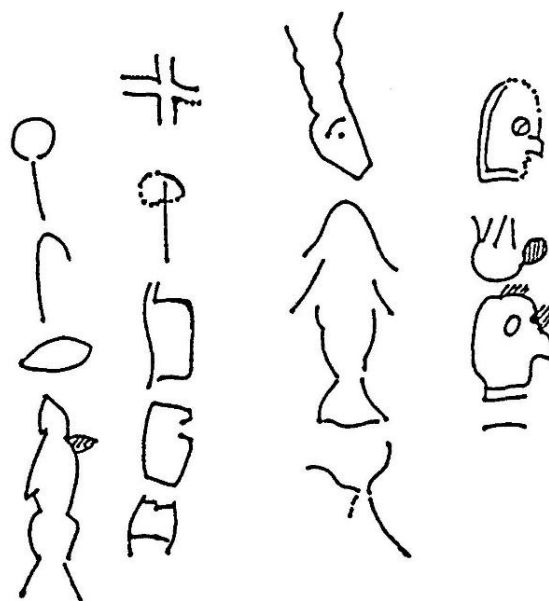
There I explained in some depth, very correctly, how the Kenites – plainly called קַיִן-*Qayin* (Cain, see Num. 24:22) – make great sense to have been the descendants of Tubal-Cain, the early pioneer of bronze and iron smelting (Gen. 4:22). The very lineage of Cain in Genesis, culminating in that noble ancestor, seems to be a tribute to the invaluable role of support they played in the Exodus. From Jethro's great hospitality to the fugitive Moses to the essential guidance provided his nation by Ḥobab. Based on Numbers 10:31, I demonstrated that he is not one and the same as Jethro/Reuel, Moses' father-in-law, but his younger brother-in-law.

It is only natural to assume that Ḥobab had inherited his people's trademark expertise in copper smelting, which could have been his great role, lauded in Numbers 10:31. And that just might have been confirmed by Gerster No. 1, which seems to commemorate a smelting furnace being provided Ḥobab and “the congregation” – assumedly to forge weapons and accoutrements for the Tabernacle. The time-consuming mining and forging process could well explain the nearly year-long encampment at Mount Sinai, which we proposed to be Jebel Safsa, a journey of several days to the south.

Difficulties and Solution

The general above scenario has great merit; it still makes great sense that the Israelites were smelting and forging weapons near Mount Sinai during the Exodus. However, where was this Mount Sinai? Besides the cumbersome point that Jebel Safsa was a bit far for materials to be easily transported to the camp, there is a serious problem with using this inscription as testimony of a specific episode from the Exodus itself.

After much more experience with Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions and a broadened understanding of the paleography, I can no longer ignore an issue unseen before. After all presented above in Section III, the problem shouldn't require more than a single image to explain:



Ibid.

If my proposed framework in Section III is sufficiently robust to establish the relative age of ancient Semitic inscriptions, *these glyphs should not belong to the Exodus period, the “middle stage”*.

Note the ⱪ-alef (Column 3, top glyph) as a well-defined ox(?) -head with an eye, brow, and long, curved horns, 𐤃-resh (Column 4, first and third glyphs) as a full and detailed human head, and 𐤁-daled (Column 3, second glyph) as a well-drawn, anatomically-detailed fish with two sets of fins. The very primitive form of the glyphs demands that they be categorized together with the Wadi el-Hol inscriptions, which date back to the reign of Pharaoh Amenemhat III.

There is actual, hard evidence for this *in situ*, where it was found, an inconvenient stumbling block for our previous position. As William Shea writes (emphasis added):^{Ibid}

When Petrie came to this particular pass [Wadi el-Nasb] during the course of his expedition through Sinai in 1905, he noted that **there was an Egyptian inscription here which was dated to the 20th year of Amenemhet III of the Twelfth Dynasty**. ...

The main inscription with which we are concerned, **Gerster No. 1, is located two meters to the left of the Egyptian inscription** along the same rock face. In view of its proximity to the Egyptian inscription, it is surprising that Petrie missed seeing it. ...

In 1962 Gardiner published a note on the date of the Protosinaitic inscriptions in which he continued to hold to an earlier date for these texts, from the time of the Twelfth Dynasty.

To restate, the Proto-Sinaitic glyphs are so close to and dominated by a prominent Egyptian inscription from the reign of Pharaoh Amenemhat III, that Sir Flinders Petrie missed it altogether. Sir Alan Gardiner judged it to be early. While anything is possible, I can no longer, in good conscience, propose an Exodus-era date (late 13th Dynasty), centuries after that pharaoh in whose reign the script first appears.

As for the biblical Kenite name *Hobab*: meaning “beloved”, it is only reasonable to assume that this was a common name among the Kenites. Just as the names Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have long been among the Israelites. As for “the congregation”, this could well apply to any league of tribes, brought together for purposes of worship. Indeed, עדת (“congregation”) for the Midianites would lend strength to a well-supported view among scholars such as Paul Haupt,¹⁵ George Mendenhall¹⁶ and William Dumbrell,¹⁷ who have come to see Midian not as a geographic place per se, but a confederation.¹⁸

We believe that Haupt's proposal is to be adopted, and that Midian, rather than depicting a land, is a general term for an amorphous league of the Late Bronze Age, of wide geographical range, who, after a series of reverses, the most prominent of which are recorded in Judges 6-7, largely disappeared from the historical scene...¹⁹

Concluding with Our New Connections: Evidence of Early Kenite Smelting Near Mount Sinai

In summary, besides providing hard evidence for the Kenite presence at Serabit el-Khadim, Gerster No. 1 can shed light on a point that confuses one reading the Torah narrative: how the Kenites seem to be Midianites as well.

The inscription connects to the forebears of Jethro's Kenite clan – again, referred to by Balaam as *Qayin* – to the legacy of *Tuval-Qayin* (Tubal-Cain), enshrined in Genesis 4:22. With a senior figure named *Hobab* among them, they were continuing their ancient tribal industry, smelting.

With Mount Sinai itself as a part of that same region, only just beyond it to the south, we get a clear picture that brings the biblical account to smaller, even more believable geographic proportions:

There, in the desert terrain just beyond, but still close to those seasonal Egyptian mines where Moses' slave brethren would come to work each year, is where the fugitive Egyptian prince found refuge among a tribe of Kenites – an outlying group of the Midianite League that had long sojourned there.

Rather than taking them deeper into the southern Sinai Peninsula, it is to those sacred mountains there where the God of Israel would beckon His People to gather. There they could be weaned away from Ba'alat, the sex cult of Hathor, the Golden Cow. There, His new nation could create His Tabernacle with the necessary accoutrements, and forge the weapons necessary for the conquest of their Promised Land.



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1. While it is well beyond the scope of this thesis, it should be noted that, besides other issues, to my close scrutiny, applying the same paleographic method as that applied in this paper (see Section III), the impressive “Proto-Sinaitic” remains at the base of Har Kharkom, with profound evidence of YHWH worship, seems to be from a later period.

The form of those glyphs suggests an early to mid-Judges-era context: a median stage between the Proto-Sinaitic stages we find at Serabit el-Khadim, and the Proto-Canaanite/Paleo-Hebrew writing noted in this work.

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Addendum

MANNA: REAL-WORLD DESERT NOURISHMENT, THEN AND NOW ¹

Lest we be accused of misrepresenting tradition, presenting manna as an ongoing desert phenomenon even in Jewish oral tradition:

the Mishnah relates to manna as a unique but natural substance, "created during the twilight of the the Sixth Day of Creation"² (meaning a general phenomenon of nature well in place before the rise of mankind), and "cleansed before its arrival by a northerly wind and subsequent rains that sweep the ground".³ Both Josephus and Dioscorides made mention of a manna that rained down in their day. The expedition by F.S. Bodenheimer to the southern Sinai Desert in 1927 is the primary source relied upon by nearly all researchers.⁴

The Torah narrative describes manna as appearing "scale-like" and compared to "hoar frost on the ground" (Ex. 16:14), yellowish ("like coriander seed"), "white" (16:31), and also brownish ("the appearance of bdellium", Num. 11:7), honey-sweet (Ex. 16:31), and disappearing in the morning with the rising heat of day (16:21).

While the most widely-accepted, textbook opinion for biblical manna's identification has shifted to the lichen *Lecanora esculenta*,⁵ all the above descriptions seem to match the more traditionally favored candidate: crystallized honeydew of scale insects, particularly that of *Trabutina mannipara*, the Tamarisk manna scale. In the desert environment, the accumulated sugary substance evaporates quickly. The loss of its water content leaves a sweet, sticky, solid residue; a source of carbohydrates.⁶

Moreover, in this candidate for manna, all the biblically-noted colors are accounted for:

Freshly fallen Tamarisk manna is whitish in color. Older manna (stored for a year) becomes a yellowish or brownish color.⁴

Its appearance overnight and disappearance from the ground up into the morning air would have inspired the sense that it was other-worldly, "falling from Heaven".

According to Encyclopedia Britannica:

...the tamarisk manna scale, *Trabutina mannipara*, is thought to have produced the biblical manna for the children of Israel. The females produce large quantities of honeydew that solidify in thick layers on plant leaves in arid regions. This sugarlike material, still collected by natives of Arabia and Iraq, is considered a great delicacy.⁶

It is called in Arabic "*mann al-sa-ma*" ("heavenly manna"), and still today collected and sold to pilgrims to the Sinai.⁷ The location of this insect population until recent times is another key point of evidence:

Tamarisk manna is found in the southern Sinai where the insects are located. It is produced in the lowlands by *Najacoccus serpentinus minor* and in mountain valleys by *Tradutina mannipara*. In the Torah the manna episode occurs between Elim and Rephidim (Wadi Gharandel to oasis Feiran). This concurs geographically to where manna has been found.⁸

One criticism levelled at the Tamarisk manna scale equation is that the quantities of manna that could be collected would not have been sufficient to supply such a large

population of Israelites with nutrition. It should be recalled that, while the manna appears to have been an important part of the Israelites' diet, they appear to have bolstered their diet with other foods.

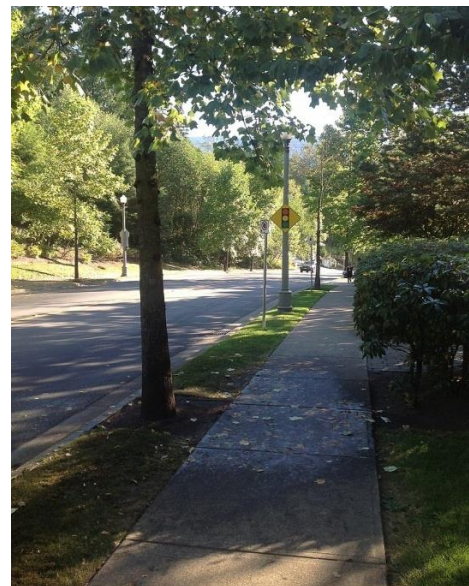
Nevertheless, the Torah does not portray the wandering Israelites as a flourishing community, but describes the Exodus as a gruelling episode during which the entire generation of Israelites that left Egypt perished in the desert, and not by the sword. For those who did survive, they would have subsisted from a low-calorie diet, which, so long as not extreme, has been widely demonstrated to prolong animal life; not shorten it.^{Ibid.}



Tamarisk trees near Bir Nasib in the Central Sinai Desert ⁹



Left: white scale insects with their waxy-honey secretions, on a branch.¹⁰



Right: Honeydew under a tree by a sidewalk, covering the ground as frost.¹¹

Verses from the relevant passage in Exodus chapter 16:

טו וַיִּרְאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל אָחִיו 'מֶן הוּא' כִּי לֹא יָדְעוּ מַה הוּא, וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם 'הוּא הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה לָכֶם לֶאֱכֹל.' **15** And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another: 'What is it?'--for they knew not what it was. And Moses said unto them: 'It is the bread which YHWH hath given you to eat.

טז 'זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר צֻוְּהָה לָקֶטֶט מִמֶּנּוּ, אִישׁ לְפִי אֲכָלוֹ, עֹמֶר לְגִלְגֶּלֶת מִסֶּפֶר נַפְשֵׁיכֶם, אִישׁ לְאִשְׁרֵי בְּאֶהְלוֹ יִקְחוּ.' **16** This is the thing which YHWH hath commanded: Gather ye of it every man according to his eating; an omer a head, according to the number of your persons, shall ye take it, every man for them that are in his tent.

- 17 And the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less.
- 18 And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating.
- 19 And Moses said unto them: 'Let no man leave of it till the morning.'
- 20 Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses, but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms and rotted, **and Moses was wroth with them.**
- 21 And they gathered it morning by morning, every man according to his eating, and as the sun waxed hot, it melted.
- יז ויעשו כן בני ישראל וילקטו, המרבה והממעט.
- יח וימדו בעמר ולא העדיף המרבה, והממעט לא החסיר; איש לפי אכלו לקטו.
- יט ויאמר משה אליהם 'איש, אל-יותר ממנו עד-בקר'.
- כ ולא שמעו אל משה, ויותרו אנשים ממנו עד בקר, וירם תולעים ויבאש, **ויקצף עלהם משה.**
- כא וילקטו אתו בבקר בבקר, איש כפי אכלו, וחם השמש ונמס.

It is also Moses who, as we see above in verse 16:20, reportedly had a strong emotional reaction to the people's misbehavior in regards to the manna. In Numbers 11:

- 4 And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept on their part and said: 'Would that we were given flesh to eat!
- 5 'We remember the fish which we were wont to eat in Egypt for free; the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic,
- 6 'but now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all – we have nothing but this manna to look to.'
- 7 Now the manna was like coriander seed, and the appearance thereof as the appearance of bdellium.
- 8 The people went about, and gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in mortars, and seethed it in pots and made cakes of it, and the taste of it was as the taste of a cake baked with oil.
- 9 And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it.
- 10 And Moses heard the people weeping, family by family, every man at the door of his tent, and the anger of YHWH was kindled greatly **and it was evil in Moses' eyes.**
- 11 And Moses said unto YHWH, 'Wherefore hast Thou dealt ill with Thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in Thy sight, that Thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?
- 12 'Have I conceived all these people?! Have I given them birth, that Thou shouldest say unto me: Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing-father carrieth the sucking child, unto the land which Thou didst swear unto their fathers?' ...
- 13 'I am not able to bear all this people myself alone, for it is too heavy for me.'
- 14 'And if Thou deal thus with me, **kill me I pray Thee...**
- ד והאספסוף אשר בקרבם התאוה ויטבדו ויבכו גם בני ישראל, ויאמרו, 'מי יאכלנו בשר!
- ה 'זכרנו את הדגה אשר נאכל במצרים חנם – את הקשאים ואת האבטחים ואת החציר ואת הבצלים ואת השומים.
- ו 'ועתה נפשנו יבשה, אין כל בלתי אל המן עינינו.'
- ז והמן כזרע גד הוא, ועינו פעין הבדלח.
- ח שטו העם ולקטו וטחנו וטחנו ברחים, או דכו במדכה, ובשלו בפרור ועשו אתו עגות, והיה טעמו כטעם לשד השמן.
- ט ובקרת הטל על המחנה לילה, ירד המן עליו.
- י וישמע משה את העם בכה למשפחותיו, איש לפתח אהלו, ויחר אף יהוה מאד ובעיני משה רע.
- יא ויאמר משה אל יהוה, 'למה הרעת לעבדך, ולמה לא מציתי חן בעיניך לשום את משא כל העם הזה עלי?
- יב 'האנכי הריתי את כל העם הזה?! האם אנכי ילדתיהו כי תאמר אלי שאתה בתיקף פאשר ישא האמן את הילק, על האדמה אשר נשבעת לאבותיו? ...
- יג 'לא אוכל אנכי לבדי לשאת את כל העם הזה, כי כבד ממני.'
- יד 'ואם ככה את עשה לי, הרגני נא הרג...'

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