

Riverbeds and Watersheds: A New Geography of the Exodus and Wanderings

INTRODUCTION

The foundational narrative of the early Israelites—their exodus from Egypt, national formation in the Sinai wilderness, and conquest of Transjordan and Canaan—is commonly viewed as literature rather than history. Mount Sinai has not been conclusively identified, few wilderness sites can be located, itinerary data seem to be incoherent, and the standard chronology does not support biblical expectations. Archaeologist Amihai Mazar states: “All that can be said is that the Exodus story is based on some remote memories” and “Most scholars of the last generation regard the Conquest narratives as a literary work of a much later time, designed to create a pan-Israelite, national saga.”*

Since 1983, veteran archaeologist and paleoethnologist Professor Emmanuel Anati has advocated for Har Karkom in the Central Negev as Mount Sinai, documenting a vast body of cultic remains as evidence. The Karkom-Sinai identity is popular in Israel, but few scholars in related fields support Anati's proposal. Dr Hurn undertook to resolve the wilderness itineraries between Goshen and the Jordan River via Har Karkom and Ein Qudeirat (Kadesh) by adopting a hydrological model of the biblical regions and a holistic approach to the geographical data. A successful reconciliation of text to terrain would have significant implications regarding the authenticity of the received text and the study of the Torah as history.

The presentation is illustrated with photos and custom-made colour maps of the Sinai-Negev and Transjordan. Some insights into the chronological issues are reviewed, along with some astonishing numerical patterns in the narratology of the Israelite journeys.

[footnote] * “The Patriarchs, Exodus, and Conquest Narratives in Light of Archaeology,” in *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 61-2.

