

A NOTICE ABOUT MANNA AND UPROOTED OPPRESSION AT SERABIT EL-KHADIM

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ABSTRACT: Both Proto-Sinaitic(P-S) inscriptions on the wall opposite the entrance to Mine L (Sinai 357) at Serabit el-Khadim appear to be pure, archaic Hebrew statements by distinct authors. By applying an ancient Yemenite-Jewish tradition in regards to the letter *מ*-*mem*, 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. The wording and phrasing of the inscriptions with parallels in TaNaKh, clues to their age, and the identification of the site with the Exodus encampment of Dofqah –that just following where the nation reportedly first encountered manna– suggest a greater historicity to those traditions than commonly assumed by academia. The letter identifications employed vis-à-vis other opinions are treated at length.

INTRODUCTION

A heretofore un-deciphered set of two inscriptions from a mine at Serabit el-Khadim was brought to my attention by the renowned Egyptologist David Rohl. He was interested to know what a fresh mind from outside of the field –a scholar with a strong command of TaNaKh (Hebrew Bible) in Hebrew, of Aramaic, and Paleo-Hebrew script, harboring no prejudices from within academia– could see in them. With no prior introduction, Rohl sent me what is believed to be the correct sequence of letters, asking if I could make out anything somehow related to the Sojourn and Exodus story.

After transcribing the letter names on paper in modern Hebrew characters, it took no more than a moment to notice a clear string of words. Aside from a single "missing" *י-yod*, representing an archaic defective spelling of Hebrew, and an archaic grammar form found sparsely in TaNaKh, it could actually be read quite naturally:

אנתשגןדךמלאבבמנד

אנתש * גן * דך * מ(י) * לאב * במנד

Per the discipline of both my yeshivah and academic training, I am ever aware of the dangers of confirmation bias and how extraordinary claims require evidence no less extraordinary. After the initial excitement, there was a strong need to confirm Rohl's identification of the letters, and to understand the adjoining horizontal inscription at the base of the vertical statement. I undertook to become fluent in the Proto-Sinaitic

alphabet, as well as in any differences of opinion there are regarding certain characters. My efforts not only confirmed for me the letter identifications of David Rohl, but also my suspicions as to the context of the vertical message. Moreover, I arrived at my own logical proof of the identification of one contested character.

Clearly the question arises if alternative interpretations could not be devised from the same letter sequences. Indeed, when one attempts to read a string of Hebrew characters, different combinations do seem possible – but only initially. In time, Occam's razor (the law of parsimony) weeds out nearly all of them. While it is true that the same sequence can usually generate several different word roots, one is limited by their logical flow (they need to generate a plausible meaning) and by the grammatical forms they can assume – even for an archaic Hebrew in its early youth. In the case of these inscriptions, after I attempted to exhaust all possible readings, even by entertaining competing opinions on the identification of two characters, one message deduced from the letter sequences appears to triumph.

When one then considers the fit of the inscribed statements into the wider context of their age and their significant, historical location in the Sinai Desert, even the careful mind is led to a dramatic conclusion. Before presenting the translation and a word-for-word analysis to prove my reading, we should explore that context.

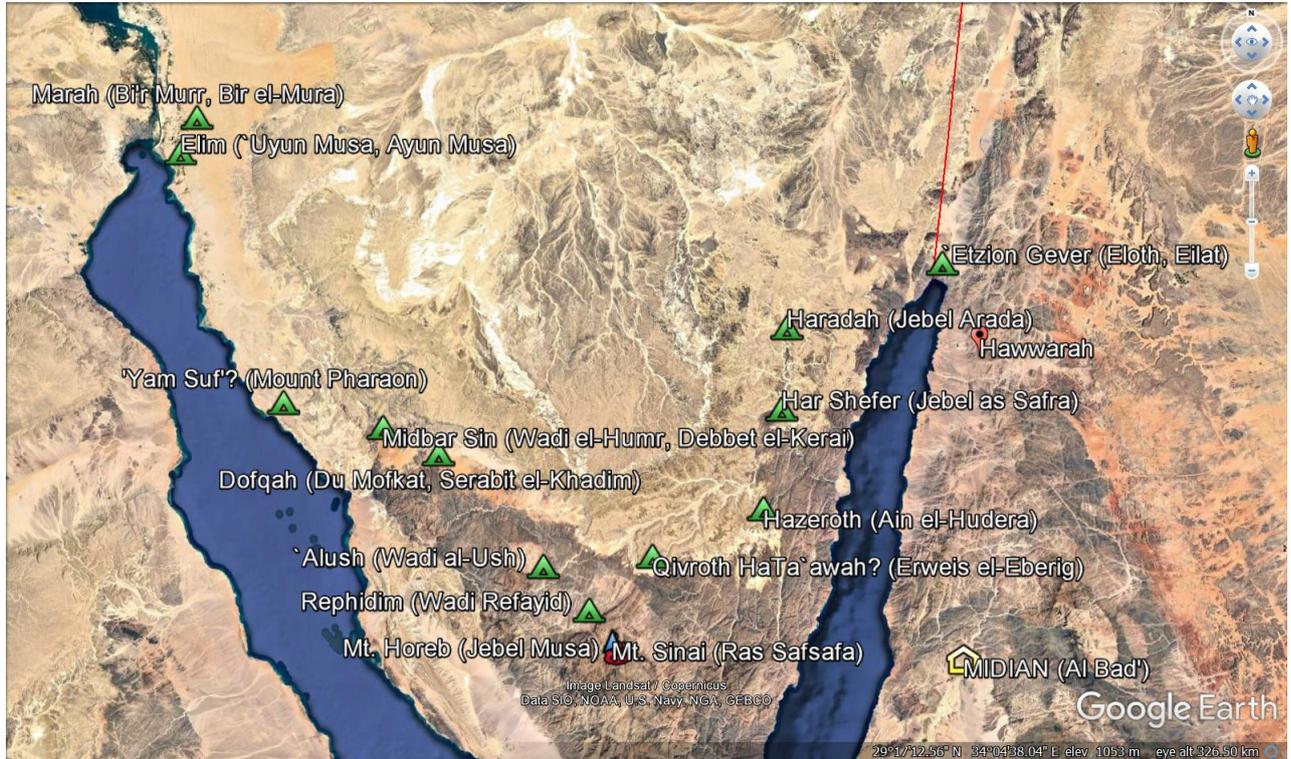
THE SIGNIFICANT LOCATION OF THE INSCRIPTIONS

The inscriptions treated here were found in an ancient mine, Mine L, at Serabit el-Khadim ("Cavern of the Slaves"). It is known to be the ancient Egyptian site where slaves toiled to mine turquoise over centuries. Rohl suspects that the name could preserve a memory from the time of Israel's sojourn in Egypt when Semitic/Hebrew miners (not all of whom were Israelites) toiled to extract turquoise for Egypt.¹

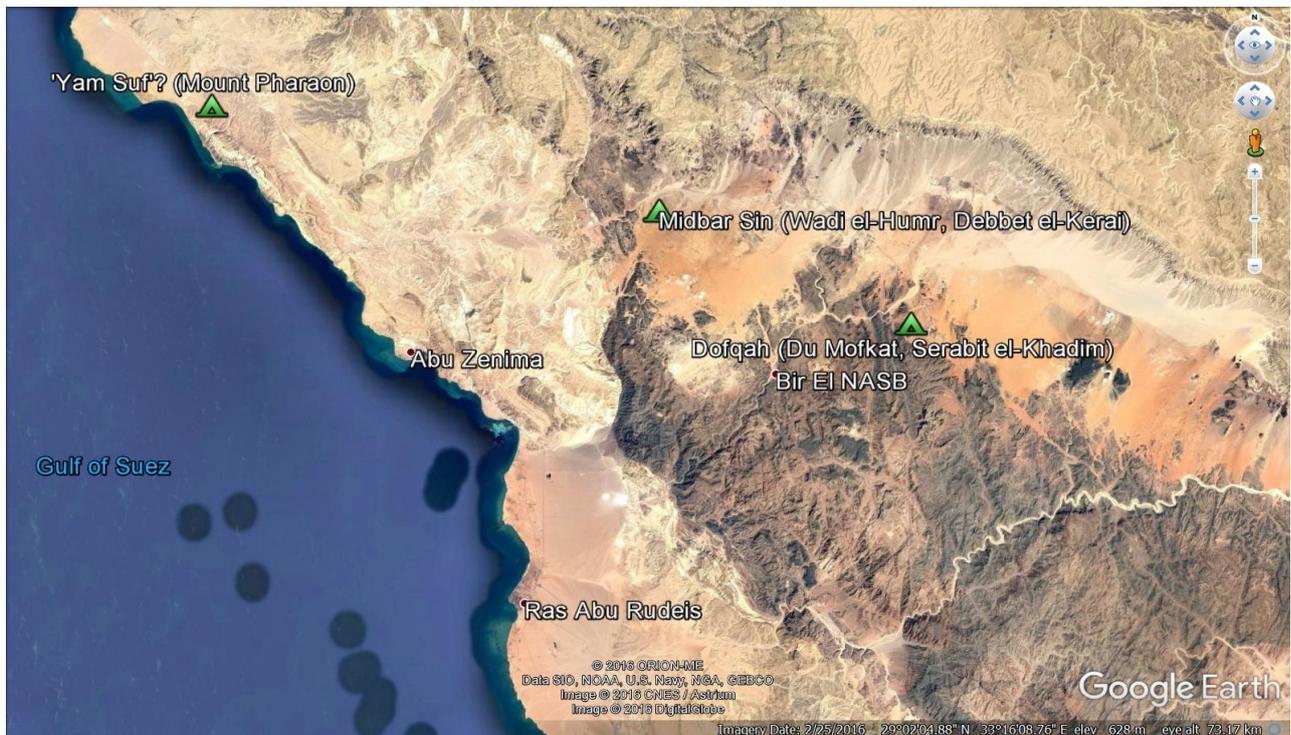
Regardless of which slaves did the labor, it is difficult to argue with Dr. Edward Robinson (namesake of Robinson's Arch on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, regarded by many scholars to be the father of biblical geography), his colleague Eli Smith,² today's David Rohl,¹ and other Egyptologists and biblical historians that **Du Mofka**(t) –the ancient Egyptian name for the plateau site of Serabit el-Khadim– preserves the ancient toponym **Dofqah**, and it is one and the same as the fifth encampment of the Israelites in their flight from Egypt en route to Mt. Sinai (Num. 33,12).

(A brief note on the historicity of Moses and the Exodus: Both are mentioned in a non-Jewish source as early as the 4th century BCE, by Hecataeus of Abdera.³ This is a full century before the Septuagint was written in Alexandria⁴ and mentions by 3rd century scholars Apartanus and Manetho. Considering Hecataeus' branding Jewish ways a "misanthropic and inhospitable way of life"³ and his odd rendering of biblical events, it is clear the philosopher was neither aiming to please a Jewish audience nor was he under their influence. He learned from Egyptian traditions from when he

visited Thebes and composed a history of Egypt.⁵ According to Apartanus, the Egyptian memory of Moses stretched back far earlier, leaving indelible imprints on Egyptian religion.⁶)



Note how Dofqah (Du-Mofkat), is the fifth encampment of the marching Israelites in the Sinai Desert.⁷ Below is a closer image of its environs.⁸





Archaeological site of the mines of Serabit-el-Khadim⁹

An array of key scholars agree¹⁰ that such a mine complex, surely known to the Sinai-grazing shepherd Moses, would have been a critical site for his nation to utilize, if they were to forge the weapons they would need for the conquest of Canaan, and the accoutrements required to create the portable shrine, the Tabernacle. While the site is famous for its turquoise mine, it is arguably even more famous for its copper mines. Despite the later revision by Egyptologists, B. Rothenberg et al. defends the older translation of *mafkat*, the source of the Egyptian name "Du-Mofka(t)", as copper.¹¹

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.

As we shall soon see, the identification of Dofqah as a mine that would have been known to and utilized by the freed Israelites en route to Sinai, provides critical context for the decoded inscriptions of Mine L on the Serabit el-Khadim mountain plateau. But it is no less significant than 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 by Robinson & Smith, Rohl, and others with Wadi el-Humr (see maps on page 3), 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. Initially an amazing phenomenon to them, it would become their precious food resource for the next 39 years. Yet the Torah records that the general behavior of the Israelites regarding the manna was less than amazing. In Exodus 16:¹²

יט ויאמר משה, אֲלֵהֶם: אִישׁ, אֶל-
 יוֹתֵר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר.

19 And Moses said unto them: 'Let no man leave of it till the morning.'

כ ולא-שָׁמְעוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, וַיֹּתְרוּ אֲנָשִׁים
מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר, וַיָּרֶם תּוֹלְעִים, וַיִּבְאֵשׁ;
וַיִּקְצַף עֲלֵהֶם, מֹשֶׁה.

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 wrath with them.**

Later, in Numbers 11:

ד וְהֶאֱסַפְסַף אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבּוֹ, הַתְּאוֹוֹתָאֵהָ;
וַיִּשְׁבּוּ וַיִּבְכוּ, גַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיֹּאמְרוּ, מִי
יֵאָכְלֵנוּ בָּשָׂר.

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!

ה זָכַרְנוּ, אֶת-הַדָּגָה, אֲשֶׁר-נֹאכַל בְּמִצְרַיִם,
חֲנָם; אֶת הַקִּישָׁאִים, וְאֶת הָאֲבֹטְחוֹת, וְאֶת-
הַחֲצִיר וְאֶת-הַבָּצְלִים, וְאֶת-הַשּׁוּמִים.

5 We remember the fish, which we were wont to eat in Egypt for nought; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic;

ו וַעֲתָה נִפְשָׁנוּ יִבְשָׁה, אֵין כֹּל--בְּלִתִּי, אֶל-
הַמָּן עֵינֵינוּ.

6 but now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all; we have nought save this manna to look to.'

THE AGE OF THE INSCRIPTIONS

Dating an ancient, un-deciphered inscription on a wall at an isolated desert site is not simple. Of two opinions, the first was put forth by William Albright, who proposed a New Kingdom date (18th and 19th Dynasties). However, this was based merely on finds on the floor of the one of the mines: a sherd of Bichrome pottery and an axe mould in the basic shape of what is believed to belong to the New Kingdom era. While those finds do suggest there might have been activity at the mine at that later period, they certainly cannot provide a reliable date for inscriptions on the *walls* of mine, being that it was used over many centuries.¹³

The second opinion is that of the pioneer of Proto-Sinaitic translation, Sir Alan Gardiner, who argued that the inscriptions were of Middle Kingdom date. This is clearly the stronger opinion on account of (a) the major activity at the mines of Serabit el-Khadim at that period, (b) the Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions at Wadi el-Hol, which, based on context, most scholars date to the late 12th Dynasty (see below), and (c) certain character signs that seem directly related to older Egyptian hieroglyphs of the Middle Kingdom era, no longer being used in New Kingdom times.¹⁴

Specifically, Gardiner tied the earliest Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions to the reign of the 12th Dynasty pharaoh Amenemhat III.¹⁵ This is highly significant, since David Rohl has conclusively demonstrated how this pharaoh's reign—his vizier and the dramatic events of his reign— not only matches the life and times of the biblical Joseph, but it belongs in the 17th century BCE the time of the early Sojourn in biblical chronology.

While providing a fair defense of Rohl's New Chronology is well beyond the scope and focus of this paper, it must be mentioned that the placement of Amenemhat III in early Sojourn-era Egypt is anchored in several formidable lines of proof. Most germane to dating the earliest Proto-Sinaitic is the work of astronomer David Lappin, whose

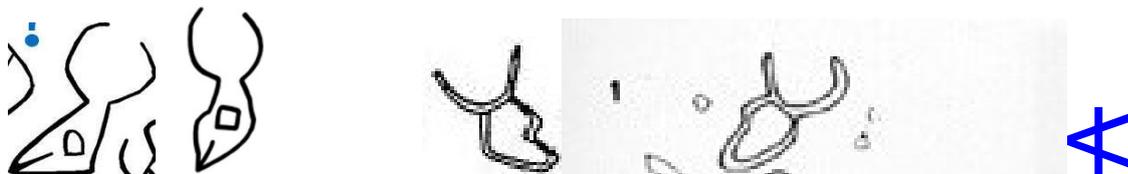
research revealed **a sequence of 37 out of 39 lunar month lengths that were recorded in 12th Dynasty contracts**. In comparison, the same regnal years in the conventional chronology only yield 21 matches at most, which is not statistically significant by comparison. Lappin hails this pattern as "startling" support for Rohl's New Chronology.¹⁶

Other proofs (among many more) include a fixed date provided by astronomy for (a) a solar eclipse at near sunset during Akhenaten's reign (which was also observed from the city of Ugarit), occurring at 6:09 PM, May 9, 1012 BCE, and (b) a powerful, indirect proof for the beginning of Neferhotep I's reign circa 1540 BCE.¹⁷ This is based on the precise astronomical dating of an extremely rare event observed in Babylon: a lunar eclipse followed by a solar eclipse only 14 days later on February 25, 1362 BCE.¹⁸ Considering that the inscriptions in Mine L at Serabit el-Khadim are revealed to be pure Hebrew, it is very fitting that the earliest Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions belong to the times of Amenemhat III – that is early Sojourn-era Egypt. In other words, it is only fitting that the earliest Hebrew writing be tied to the early Hebrews.

Naturally, the inscriptions at Mine L in the Sinai Desert would need to be at least two centuries younger in order to support my interpretation that they are from the time of the Israelite Exodus. Indeed, it is possible to demonstrate how the style of Mine-L Proto-Sinaitic characters represent **a later, more evolved form** of the script from those Amenemhat III-era inscriptions, in their utterly distinct context at Wadi el-Hol (carved on the rocky sides of an ancient desert military and trade road linking Thebes and Abydos). Dr. Douglas Petrovich presents this argument,¹⁹ and supports it with the following sound examples.

Beneath each point noted by Petrovich are two sets of Proto-Sinaitic images: Those on the left are from the Wadi el-Hol inscriptions. Those to their right are from the Serabit el-Khadim inscriptions in the Sinai Desert at Mine L (Sinai 357, the subject of this paper) and Mine N (Sinai 361). To the far right, in blue, is the Phoenician letter form²⁰ (nearly identical to Paleo-Hebrew) from much later times. Scanning from left to right, the reader can see how the later P-S form is indeed a further step in the evolution of the letter.

(1) In the earlier P-S form of **𐤀-aleph**, the glyph had "an eye with a pupil and a mouth". Those disappear in the later forms, and are surely not present in Phoenician **𐤀-aleph**.



(2) ה-*heb* went from a "jubilant man with large circular head", "short upper arms" and "diagonally-bent legs" to a "tiny head", "long forearms" and "mostly right-angled or poorly defined legs". Note how the later P-S form is closer to Phoenician ה-*heb*.



(3) כ-*kaph* changed from "an arms-and-circular-hands pictograph" to a hand with fingers. Again, the Serabit el-Khadim form is closer to the Phoenician letter.



(4) Regarding ר-*resh*, I depart slightly from Petrovich's description. It evolved from an open shape of a head and neck from an unclear direction, with what appears to be a mushroom-shaped coiffure, to a clear side-view of a head and neck, in which the line from chin to throat slopes down inwards. This puts P-S ר-*resh* on the evolutionary trajectory towards the Phoenician/Paleo-Hebrew character.



MANNA: REAL-WORLD DESERT NOURISHMENT, THEN AND NOW

Lest we be accused of misrepresenting tradition, the Mishnah relates to manna as a unique but natural substance, "created during the twilight of the the Sixth Day of Creation"²¹ (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.²² Indeed, 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.²³

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*,²⁴ 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.²⁴ All the colors are accounted for:

Freshly fallen Tamarisk manna is whitish in color. Older manna (stored for a year) becomes a yellowish or brownish color.²³

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.²⁵

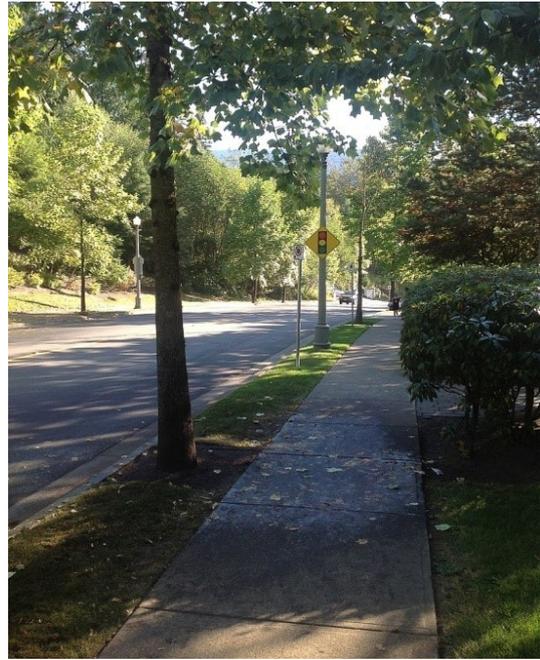
It is called in Arabic "*mann al-sa-ma*" ("heavenly manna"), and still collected and sold to pilgrims to the Sinai.²⁶ The location of this insect population until recent times is another key point of evidence:

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 *Trabutina 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.²²

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. Even so, 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 has been widely demonstrated to prolong animal life; not shorten it.²⁷



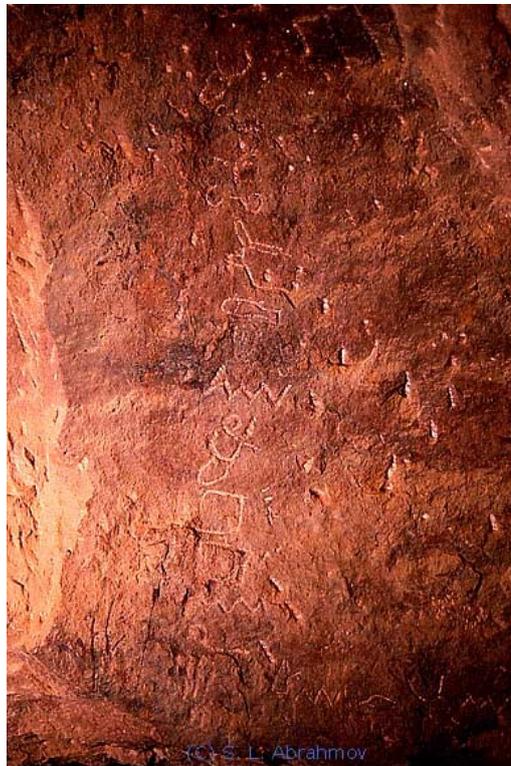
Tamarisk trees near Bir Nasib in the Central Sinai Desert²⁸



Left: white scale insects with their waxy-honey secretions, on a branch.²⁹
Right: Honeydew under a tree, covering the ground as frost.³⁰

THE WALL INSCRIPTIONS AT MINE L, SERABIT EL-KHADIM

We finally come to the inscriptions in Proto-Sinaitic on the wall of Mine L. They are alone; no other inscriptions were found anywhere else on the walls of the mine.



Close-up of the writing on the wall opposite the entrance to Mine L.³¹

Below are the identifications of the characters in regular Hebrew script according to David Rohl and myself:

1 aleph
 2 nun
 3 tau
 4 shin
 5 gimmel
 6 nun
 7 daled
 8 khaph
 9 *mi* (ancient Yemenite name for letter *mem*)
 10 lamed
 11 aleph
 12 beth
 13 beth
 14 mem
 15 nun
 16 khaph

(For reasons explained below, character 4 should not be read as Proto-Sinaitic 𐤃-*samekh*, but a variant glyph of 𐤅-*shin*.)

(For reasons explained below, character 5 should not be read as Proto-Sinaitic 𐤄-*peh*, but the throwstick symbol for 𐤅-*gimmel*.)

In his modifications to Albright, B. Sass drew the last letter as a likely khaph (כ)

14
 15
 16

shin mem `ayin aleph mem resh aleph resh beth `ayin

THE VERTICAL SCRIPT , A PUBLIC NOTICE

As presented above, according to my decipherment, the vertical line of script reads, in modern Hebrew script:

אנתש * גן * דך * מ(י) * לאב * במנד

The most likely, straightforward translation of this line is:

"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?!**"

It is comprised of two very matching statements, each exactly eight characters long, both ending in כ-khaf (characters 8 and 16). Moreover, both endings were drawn by William Albright with diagonal lines just under כ-*khaf*, denoting rough spots on the rock surface. This is another clue that both places mark the end of independent clauses; that the author planned the spacing of his message according to these surface

anomalies, or created those rough ends to mark the ends of sentences. Stunningly, the two statements seem to rhyme:

**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 (a biblical phrase)

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:

י ראה הפקדתיך היום הנה, על-הגוים ועל-הממלכות, לנתוש ולנתוץ, ולהאבד ולהרוס--לבנות, ולנטוע. **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 slight preference of the past or present perfect tense over the future will become clear below, they depend on a key point in biblical grammar:

In scattered places in TaNaKh (such as in II Kings 12,14-18), 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 (ישיר-*yashir*), 15,5 (יבסִימוּ-*yekhasyumu*), 15,6 (תִּרְעֵץ-*tir`as*) 15,7 (תִּשְׁלַח-*t'shallabh*), 15,12 (תִּבְלַעְמוּ-*tivla`emo*), 15,14 (יִרְגָּזוּן-*yirgazun*), and in the Song of Deborah: Judges 5,6 (יִלְכּוּ-*yel'khu*), 5,8 (יִבְהַר-*yivbhar*), 5,13 (יֵרַד-*yerad* (x2), 5,17 (יִגּוּר-*yagur*), 5,21 (תִּדְרְכֵי-*tidrekhî*), 5,26 (תִּשְׁלַחְנָה-*tishlahbnah*). 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 we see in אנתש-*Entosh*. 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--מִשְׁפַּט עֲבָדֵי, וְאֶמְתִּי: בָּרָבָם, עִמָּדִי. **13** If I did despise the cause of my man-servant, or of my maid-servant, when they contended with me.

In Job 32,11-12:

11 Behold, I waited for your words, **I listened** for your reasons, whilst ye searched out what to say.
יא הן הוֹחֵלְתִּי, לְדַבְרֵיכֶם--אֲזִין, עַד-
תְּבוֹנָתֵיכֶם: עַד-תִּחְקְרוּן מִלִּין.

12 Yea, **I attended** unto you, and, behold, there was none that convinced Job, or that answered his words, among you.
יב וְעַדִּיכֶם, אֶתְבוֹנֶן: וְהִנֵּה אֵין לְאִיֹּב
מוֹכִיחַ--עוֹנֶה אֶמְרֵיו מִכֶּם.

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

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

Considering this archaic "past-future" verb form employed both in Job and in the Song of the Sea, a song reportedly sung *only weeks prior* to the encampment in Dofqah, and the poetic style of the vertical script, a past tense reading indeed looks quite possible. When one then considers the overall context (see the next explanation on גן-gan [garden] below), it becomes the stronger possibility, if only slightly.

Those fluent in Hebrew may be bothered that the ג-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 *Ettosh*. However, one example of how this rule was not firmly in place at the time of the Exodus is Numbers 14,3:

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?
ג וְלָמָּה יְהוָה מְבִיא אֶתְנוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת,
לִנְפֹל בַּחֶרֶב--נִשְׁיֵנוּ וְטַפְּנוּ, יִהְיוּ לְבָז; הֲלוֹא
טוֹב לָנוּ, שׁוּב מִצְרָיִם.

Note how the ג-nun remains, not becoming **לפול**. Other examples of this from later in TaNaKh include Isaiah 58,3 (תִּגְשׁוּ-tingosu), Psalms 68,3 (תִּדּוֹף-tindof), Zechariah 1,16 (יִנְטֵה-yinnateh), Jeremiah 6,4 (יִנְטֵה-yinnatu), and Isaiah 51,16 (לִינְטֵה-lintoa). In this historical context, the usage of *Entosh* is perfectly acceptable.

גן

a Garden (or "park")

This is most likely referring to the Land of Egypt, whence the Israelites had just departed only weeks earlier. An alternate possibility, that it refers to Canaan, is explored below.

In the Torah, Egypt is viewed as a 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
 ברגלך כגון 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, תשטה-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 כלה,
 משקה--לפני שחת יהוה, את-סדם ואת-עמרה, כגון-יהנה
 כארץ מצרים, באכה צער.

10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before *YHWH* destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, **like the garden of *YHWH*, like the land of Egypt**, as thou goest unto Zoar.

דך - *dakh*

an oppressed (or "lowly")

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

י ויהי יהוה משגב לדך; 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".

מ(י) 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 – *Oboli-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:

אבישאי – *Avi-shai* meaning "My Father is a Gift"

אביחיל – *Avi-hhayil* (Abigail) meaning "My Father is Mighty"

יואב – *Yo-Av* (Joab), from יהואב-*Yebo-Av*, meaning "Yab is Father"

אביה – *Avi-Yab* meaning "My Father is Yab", 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 בְּנֵי אֱתֶם, לִיהֲנָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: לֹא תִתְגַּדְדוּ, וְלֹא תִשִּׂימוּ קַרְחָה בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם--לְמַת. **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)

Now besides the desire to make sense of the message, there are good reasons to translate the lone מ-*mem* as the full question word מי - *mi* (who?). First, if read as "from", the lone מ-*mem* renders the message incomprehensible. But there is a greater reason. Yemenite Jewry, who are widely known to have preserved some of the oldest living traditions in regards to the Hebrew letters and pronunciation, preserved the name for the letter מ-*mem* as *mi*. From time immemorial, all communities of Yemen (whose customs can vary significantly from one another) have called regular *mem* (מ) *mi-f'tubba* (open *mem*), and final *mem* (ם) *mi-s'tumah* (sealed *mem*). Since the letter's very name sounds identical to מי - the question word "who?", it is likely to signify that word. This would represent an archaic defective spelling from those times, when there may not have been any *matres lectionis* in Hebrew.

Again, if it is not read that way, the statement is rendered senseless. If it is read as a shortened form of מי - *mi* (who?), 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 26 then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said: **'Who is for YHWH?** -- let him come unto me!' And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.

במנדך?

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.

UNDERSTANDING THE MESSAGE

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.

אנתש * גך * דך * מ(י) * לאב * במנד

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 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 דַּבְּ-*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:

כֹּז כִּי אֶת-כָּל-הַתּוֹעֵבוֹת הָאֵל, עָשׂוּ אַנְשֵׁי-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 ו-*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:

- א 1 ..."**I will sing** unto YHWH..." אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה...
- ב 2 ... this is my God, and **I will glorify** Him; my father's God, and **I will exalt** Him." בְּנֵה אֱלֹהֵי וְאֲנֹנְהוּ, אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי וְאֲרַמְמֶנְהוּ.
- ט 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...'" ט אָמַר אוֹיֵב אֲרִדְּהָ אֲשִׁיגָה, אֲחַלְקָהּ שְׁלָלָהּ; תִּמְלְאֻמוּ נַפְשֵׁי-- אֲרִיק חֶרְבִּי... (Ex. 15)

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

- ג כּ פּי שֵׁם יְהוָה, אֶקְרָא: הָבוּ גִדְל, לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ. 3 For **I will proclaim** the name of *YHWH*; ascribe ye greatness unto our God. (Deut. 32,3)
- כּ וַיֹּאמֶר, אֶסְתַּיְרָה פְּנֵי מַהֶם-- אֶרְאֶה, מָה אַחֲרֵיהֶם... 20 And He said: '**I will hide** My face from them, **I will see** what their end shall be...
- כּא ...וְאֲנִי אֶקְרִיֵאֵם בְּלֹא-עַם, בְּגוֹי נֹבֵל אֲכַעִיסֵם. 21 ... and **I will rouse** them to jealousy with a non-people; **I will provoke** them with a vile nation.

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 the long time of attempting to decipher the message, reading the letters 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:

ש מ ע א מ ר א ר ב ע

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

ש מ ע * א מ ר * א ר ב ע

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

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

- ב וְהָיָה, כְּקָרַבְכֶם אֶל-הַמִּלְחָמָה; וְנָגַשׁ הַכֹּהֵן, וְדַבֵּר אֶל-הָעָם. 2 And it shall be, when ye draw nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people,
- ג וְאָמַר אֲלֵהֶם שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, אַתֶּם קָרַבְתֶּם הַיּוֹם לַמִּלְחָמָה עַל-אֹיְבֵיכֶם; אַל-יִרָד לִבְכָּכֶם, אַל-תִּירָאוּ וְאַל-תִּחַפְּזוּ וְאַל-תִּעֲרָצוּ-- מִפְּנֵיהֶם. 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;

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

- ג וְשָׁמַעְתָּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְשָׁמַרְתָּ לַעֲשׂוֹת, אֲשֶׁר יֵיטֵב לְךָ, וְאֲשֶׁר תִּרְבּוּן מְאֹד... 3 **Hearken** therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that 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*. And it boldly does so in the name of the inscriber, Arba`. It is a signed approbation.

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 קְרִיַת אַרְבַּע, הָאָדָם הַגָּדוֹל בְּעֵנָקִים הוּא; וְהָאָרֶץ שָׁקְטָה, מִמִּלְחָמָה. 15 Now the name of Hebron beforetime was Kiriath-arba`, which Arba` was 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,³² 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:

* א * נ * ת * ש * ג * נ * ד * ד *
 * מ * (י) * ל * א * ב * ב * מ * נ * ד *
 ש * מ * ע * א * מ * ר * א * ר * ב * ע

**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). Verses from the relevant passage in Ex. 16:

טו וַיִּרְאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אָחִיו מִן הָאָדָם--כִּי לֹא יָדְעוּ, מַה-הוּא; וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה, אֲלֵהֶם, הוּא הַלֶּחֶם, אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה לָכֶם לֶאֱכֹלָהּ.

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 צִוָּה יְהוָה, לִקְטוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ, אִישׁ לְפִי אֲכָלוֹ: עֹמֶר לְגִלְגָּלֹת, מִקִּפְּר נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם--אִישׁ לֶאֱשֶׁר בְּאֶהְלוֹ, תִקְחוּ.

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.'

יז וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-כֵן, בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל; וַיִּלְקְטוּ; הַמְרִבָּה וְהַמְמַעֵט.

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.
- יח וַיִּמְדוּ בַעֲמֹר--וְלֹא הָעֲדִיף הַמְרַבָּה, וְהַמִּמְעֵיט לֹא הִקְסִיר: אִישׁ לְפִי-אָכְלוֹ, לָקְטוּ.
- 19 And Moses said unto them: 'Let no man leave of it till the morning.'
- יט וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה, אֲלֵהֶם: אִישׁ, אַל-יֹתֵר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר.
- 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.**
- כ וְלֹא-שָׁמְעוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, וַיֹּתְרוּ אַנְשִׁים מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר, וַיֵּרָם תּוֹלְעִים, וַיִּבָּאשׁ; וַיִּקְצַף עֲלֵהֶם, מֹשֶׁה.
- 21 And they gathered it morning by morning, every man according to his eating; and as the sun waxed hot, it melted.
- כא וַיִּלְקְטוּ אֹתוֹ בַּבֹּקֶר בַּבֹּקֶר, אִישׁ כְּפִי אָכְלוֹ; וְחַם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, וַנִּמְסָ.
- 22 And it came to pass that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one; and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses.
- כב וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי, לָקְטוּ לֶחֶם מִשְׁנֵה--שְׁנֵי הָעֹמֶר, לְאִחָד; וַיָּבֹאוּ כָל-נְשִׂאֵי הָעֵדָה, וַיִּגִּידוּ לְמֹשֶׁה.

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!"
- ד וְהָאֶסְפָּסָף אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבּוֹ, הִתְאָוִי תַאֲוָה; וַיִּשְׁבּוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ, גַּם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיֹּאמְרוּ, מִי יֵאָכְלֵנוּ בָּשָׂר.
- 5 "We remember the fish, which we were wont to eat in Egypt for nought; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic;
- ה זָכַרְנוּ, אֶת-הַדָּגָה, אֲשֶׁר-נֹאכַל בְּמִצְרַיִם, חִנָּם; אֶת הַקִּשְׁאִים, וְאֶת הָאֲבֹטְחַיִם, וְאֶת-הַחֲצִיר וְאֶת-הַבְּצָלִים, וְאֶת-הַשׁוּיִמִּים.
- 6 but now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all; we have nought save this manna to look to."
- ו וְעַתָּה נַפְשֵׁנוּ יִבֹּשֶׁה, אֵין כֹּל--בְּלִתִּי, אֶל-הַמָּן עֵינֵינוּ.
- 7 Now the manna was like coriander seed, and the appearance thereof as the appearance of bdellium.
- ז וְהַמָּן, כְּזֶרַע-גַּד הוּא; וְעֵינֵנו, כְּעֵין הַבְּדֵלְחַ.
- 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.
- ח נָשׂוּטוּ הָעָם וְלָקְטוּ וְטָחְנוּ בְּרִחִים, אוֹ דָכוּ בְּמֹדֵכָה, וּבִשְׁלוּ בַפְּרוֹר, וַעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ עֲגוֹת; וְהָיָה טַעְמוֹ, כְּטַעַם לֶשֶׁד הַשֶּׁמֶן.
- 9 And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it.
- ט וּבְרִדַת הַטַּל עַל-הַמַּחֲנֶה, לַיְלָה, יָרַד הַמָּן, עָלָיו.
- 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.**
- י וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה מִשְׁעָה אֶת-הָעָם, בְּכַה לְמִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ--אִישׁ, לְפֶתַח אֹהֶלוֹ; וַיִּחַר-אַף יְהוָה מְאֹד, וַבְּעֵינֵי מֹשֶׁה רָע.

יא ויאמר משה אל-יהוה, למה הרעת לעבדך, ולמה לא-מציתי חן, בעיניך: לשום, את-משא כל-העם הזה--עלי. 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?'

יב האנכי הריתי, את כל-העם הזה--אם-אנכי, ולדתיהו: כי-תאמר אלי שאהו בתיקה, כאשר ישא האמן את-הינק, על האדמה, אשר נשבעת לאבותיו. ... 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?" ...

יד לא-אוכל אנכי לבדי, לשאת את-כל-העם הזה: כי כבד, ממני. 14 "I am not able to bear all this people myself alone, because it is too heavy for me."

טו ואם-ככה את-עשה לי, הרגני נא הרג... 15 "And if Thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee..."

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

WHY IS NOT 𐤔-SAMEKH, BUT A VARIANT OF 𐤔-SHIN

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

"support" or "lean [upon]".³³ 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 *𐤔-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 *𐤔-shin*.

4. The glyph in question shares the key "W" feature that would be inherited by the Paleo-Hebrew/Phoenician *𐤔-shin* with the confirmed glyph for *𐤔-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 $\Psi\Psi$ -*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*.

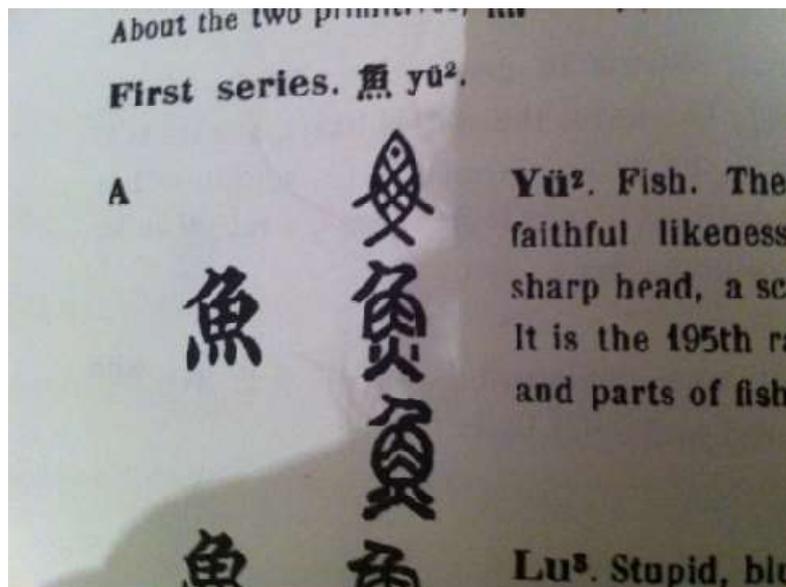


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4. The presence of variant glyphs in an early stage before they merge or one is chosen seems to have been the rule for written languages in early development – not the exception. Here is an example from Chinese:

Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of a unified China and founder of the Qin dynasty, ruled from 220 to 210 BCE.³⁵ 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.³⁶

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.³⁷ In the image below, three variants of Yú (魚), meaning "fish", are portrayed:³⁸



Similarly, the character Shì (事), meaning "to serve; any affair, thing, or matter" has four different versions.³⁹ Dān (丹), the glyph for cinnabar (the red mineral employed in Chinese alchemy) also has four variants.⁴⁰ 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 ψ -*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.⁴¹

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

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

In Song of Songs 4,5:

ה שני שדיך כשני עפרים, תאומי צביה,	5 Thy two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a
בשושנים, הרועים,	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:

unwitting, uninitiated students of mine, without prompting them, what they thought. Every one of them chose 𐤎-*nun*. First, the perfectly-enclosed loop for a snake-head distinguishes it from the open P-S 𐤌-*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 𐤎-*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:



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

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. (Alternately, it could refer to Canaan being held firmly in the hands of foes who were "defiling" it, in the eyes of the Hebrews).

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.

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 *W-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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