

## Supplementa Ismaelitica 14: Mount Hor and Kadesh Barnea

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Much confusion has been created in the interpretation of Numb. 20; 21:4.10-13; 33:35-45 by the discovery of the "true" Kadesh Barnea in the Negeb (regardless of whether one locates that oasis and settlement from the period of the Judaeen kingdom at <sup>C</sup>Ain Qudēs or at <sup>C</sup>Ain el-Qudērāt). It is frequently disregarded that the biblical Kadesh is not necessarily, or not always, identical with the "historical" Kadesh. Starting at least with the first century BCE (but most probably commencing some time earlier), Jewish tradition identified Kadesh with Nabataean Petra (1QGenAp XXI 11; Ismael, 46 n. 212), and a case can be made for the same identification in Gen. 14:7 (Ismael, 143). The equation of Kadesh with Petra presupposes the breakdown of Persian rule over North Arabia, which happened ca. 400 BCE (KNAUF 1990), and the subsequent rise of the Nabataean polity (Ismael, 137). Thus, a *terminus a quo* is established for those late Biblical texts which look for Kadesh at Petra.

As far as I see, it has not yet been noticed that Kadesh = Petra also applies to Numb. 33:36f. H.GESE (1967:87 n. 30) was aware of this possibility, but disregarded it for the sake of his source-critical theory (85f). The itinerary Numb. 33:35-45 only makes sense if all the places, including Kadesh, were located between the gulf of Aqabah and Moab: Ezion Geber (in such a late text, an archaizing substitute for Elath/el-<sup>C</sup>Aqabah) - Kadesh (Petra) - Mount Hor - Salmonah (probably Bīr Madkūr) - Punon (Fēnān) - Oboth (el-Wēbeh) - Iyye Abarim (Moabite <sup>C</sup>Ai, cf. NOTH 1940: 14f; DONNER 1982: 183-188; KNAUF 1991: 286f; but cf. also MILLER

1989: 588f) - Dibon Gad (*Dībān*). To be sure, one cannot reach Petra from Aqabah in one day's march. This, however, only indicates that the author did not have access to any listings of place-names between Elath and Kadesh. A location of his Kadesh at <sup>C</sup>*Ain Qudēs* does not make any sense at all: given that the location of Salmonah is open to re-consideration, one would still proceed from <sup>C</sup>*Ain Qudēs* to *Fē-nān* via <sup>C</sup>*Ain el-Wēbeh*, and not vice versa. Since the main Nabataean settlement in the Petra region (the Nabataean "capital", if there was any) prior to the late first century BCE, has to be sought at *el-Jī'* (*Wādī Mūsā*) rather than at Late Nabataean/Roman Petra (WO 16 [1985], 117), one day's march to negotiate the difficult descend from *Wādī Mūsā* to Mount Hor, and another day to reach the bottom of Wadi Arabah, sounds quite reasonable.

The observation that Kadesh in Numb. 33:36f is already located in the Petra region implies that the author of Numbers 33 has the Israelites "circumambulate" Edom from the west, via Wadi Arabah. Even if, at the time of the late Biblical authors, what remained of the people of Edom lived to the west of Wadi Arabah, these authors never recognized such a "western Edom" and continued to restrict the name to the southern Transjordanian plateau. In 1 Chronicles 2 and 4, the Hebrew Bible testifies to a considerable Edomite/Idumean presence in post-exilic Southern Judah, but does so by referring to their tribes and clans as "Judaeans" (or "Kalebites"; cf. Ismael, 68; 158). Whereas the author of Numbers 33 knew geography (or used a reliable source), the author of Numb. 21:10-13 obviously did not: based on a general theory that the Israelites came out of the desert and that the desert was "east", he makes the Israelites circumvent Edom from the East. Moabite Ai (Iyye Abarim, v.11) now becomes a place in the desert and east of Moab (neither of which is true), and furthermore, a place south of the River Zered (if identical with *Wādī Ḥasā*, equally untrue). Numb. 21:10-13 was not a source of Numbers 33; on the contrary, Numbers 33 was copied (and seriously

misinterpreted) by the author of Numb. 21:10-13 (cf. already DAVIES 1983:7-8; MILLER 1989:585-7).

Even if misinterpreted, Numb. 33:36-45 is the organizing principle behind the whole composition Numb. 20:14 (and possibly even 20:1) - 21:11 with the sole exception of 20:1-3 which interrupts the sequence 20:22-29.21:4 and was probably inserted on the basis of the assumption that Kadesh was situated in the region of <sup>C</sup>Ain Qudēs/el-Qudērāt (and on the basis of a very generous attitude towards space and distance; for the possibility of reading *drk* (<sup>C</sup>*yr*) *h-tmrym* instead of *drk* 'trym, which would make Numb. 21:1-3 an even more pronounced parallel to Judg. 1:16-17 than the text already provides, cf. GesMD s.v.). Salmona/Bīr Madkūr (33:41f) is represented in Numb. 21:4 by "on the way to *ym swp* in order to circumambulate Edom". Here, *ym swp* can only refer to the Gulf of Aqabah (Midian, 145). To march from the Petra region to the sea implies moving down to Wadi Arabah. The next station, Punon (33:42f), is represented in 21:5-9 by the episode of the brazen snake (and is not "omitted", pace DAVIES 1983: 11). Following the general pattern set out by Numbers 33, even Numb. 21:16 and 22 make perfect sense: Kadesh, then, is indeed a "town on the edge of the country of Edom" (21:16; cf. for the difficulties that arise if this Kadesh is located in the Negeb, BLUM 1990: 118f). Kadesh/el-Jī' is situated on the first step of the Transjordanian precipice below the Edomite plateau. Moving from Kadesh to Mount Hor, i.e. west (21:22), does indeed avoid Edom as indicated in Numbers 33.

Now the conclusion is inevitable that, from the very beginning of its literary existence in the Hebrew Bible, Mount Hor is to be sought where it has always been located by the tradition which is first unmistakably attested in Jos. ant. IV 83 and which was later inherited by Christians and Moslems: at *Jabal (an-Nabī) Hārūn*. Two additional arguments may support that equation. The name "Hor" is nothing but a dialectical variant of the appellative *har(r)*

"mountain" (HAL s.v.). A mountain which is called "The Mountain" *kat' exochēn* should indeed be a very prominent mountain, as *Jabal Hārūn* in fact is: it is a landmark that dominates Wadi Arabah from shortly north of Aqabah well to the *Wādī Fidān (Fēnān)* region, a fact that destines *Jabal Hārūn* to always have been regarded as a "holy mountain" (Midian, 62). In addition, its present name may well presuppose a Canaanite name \**Hōrōn* (for the optional character of the locative *-ōn*, cf. BORÉE 1968: 62); one may well ask whether *Jabal Hārūn* did not contribute to the Islamic form of Aaron's name rather than being wholly derivative of the latter.

That *Jabal Hārūn* was a pre-Jewish, pre-Christian and pre-Muslim "holy mountain" is indeed amply attested by Nabataean pilgrim's marks, remains of monumental architecture, and the orientation of major Nabataean cultic architecture towards *Jabal Hārūn* (LINDNER 1973: 30-34; 1989: 291). The pre-biblical holiness of *Jabal Hārūn* is still invoked by the songs of the *Liyātheneh* who come to the prophet's sanctuary praying for rain as their Nabataean (and pre-Nabataean) predecessors had done two millennia earlier when the god of the mountain answered to another name. In these songs, the thirst-quenching Aaron/Hārūn is called "great star" (*nijm (i)kbīr*) and "father/possessor of the high planets" (*abu l-kawākib el-<sup>C</sup>āliyah*; CANAAN 1929: 211; cf. for the astral connotations of the Syrian-Arabian wheather-god, BN 23 [1984], 26-28; Ismael, 154).

The sanctity of *Jabal Hārūn* is more ancient than the texts which make the mountain the scene of Aaron's death (cf. for Aaron as a late biblical purely literary figure M.GÖRG, NBL I, 1f). It is not without irony that the biblical reception, "demythologization" and "historization" of a holy mountain on the borders of Palestine has contributed, finally, to the survival of both the holiness of that mountain and of its god (in disguise) into monotheistic times.

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