THE WILDERNESS ITINERARIES AND RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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The constant flow, one might say flood, of news about archaeological discoveries in Palestine and neighbouring areas leads, quite properly, to new suggestions about the course of biblical history or the interpretation of difficult texts, and also to fresh consideration of earlier theories. Such "new light" is particularly to be expected from excavations and surveys in the land where ancient Israel lived for most of its history and where most of the Old Testament was written. A recent example of great importance is the publication of I. Finkelstein's detailed study of *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem, 1988). But archaeological research in more outlying areas, such as the Sinai peninsula and the extreme south of Palestine, may also be illuminating, and in the past decade details have been published of two major projects which, it is claimed, have important contributions to make to the geographical aspects of the Exodus and wilderness traditions. It is the purpose of this article to assess the validity of these new proposals and also to lay down some more general guidelines for the evaluation of future reconstructions based on archaeological discoveries which, it may be hoped, will be made in these and other areas.

The episode of the crossing of the "sea" (Ex. xiv 1–xv 21) is given a location in some passages by means of the term *yam swp*, which has been variously interpreted by scholars, but in two itinerary texts (Ex. xiv 2, 9; Num. xxxiii 7) the place is identified by no less than three place-names: *pt hâfrôt, migdôl* and *ba'âl s'pôn*. Following the lead of the Egyptologist H. Brugsch and O. Eissfeldt, who was able to make use of Ugaritic evidence, an apparently growing number of scholars sees in this an indication that one strand at least of the Pentateuchal narrative placed the "sea"-crossing at Lake Bardawil (Lake Sirbonis of the classical authors), a lagoon on the Mediterranean coast east of Port Said which is separated from the sea by a narrow spit of land
through which the sea has been known to break from time to time.\footnote{H. Brugsch, *L'Exode et les monuments égyptiens* (Leipzig, 1875); O. Eissfeldt, *Baal Zaphon, Zeus Kasios und der Durchzug des Israeliten durchs Meer* (Halle, 1932), pp. 48–65. On Brugsch see H. Engel, *Die Vorfahren Israels in Ägypten. Forschungsgeschichtlicher Überblick über die Darstellungen seit Richard Lepsius (1849)* (Frankfurt, 1979), pp. 25–7, who mentions a little-known forerunner of Brugsch in this respect. They are followed by M. Noth in J. Fueck (ed.), *Festschrift für O. Eissfeldt* (Halle, 1947), pp. 184–5; H. Cazelles, *RB* 62 (1955), pp. 321–64; Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible* (London, 1966), p. 179; M. Dothan, *Proceedings of the Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies, 1969* (Jerusalem, n.d.), pp. 223–4; G. Fohrer, *Geschichte der israelitischen Religion* (Berlin, 1969), p. 59; S. Herrmann, *Israels Aufenthalt in Ägypten* (Stuttgart, 1970), pp. 87–91; S. Norin, *Er Spaltet das Meer* (Lund, 1977), pp. 32–3; M.A. Klopfenstein, in B. Rothenberg and H. Weyer, *Sinai: Pharaonen, Bergleute, Pilger und Soldaten* (Berne, 1979), p. 21; H. Donner, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen* (Göttingen, 1987), p. 94. There is an aerial photograph of the spit in Rothenberg and Weyer, pl. 1.} This feature might, it is thought, provide a clue to the catastrophe which befell the Egyptians and allowed the Israelites to escape, just as in later periods of antiquity disasters were known to have occurred at this point (Diodorus Siculus i 30, xvi 46; Strabo, *Geog.* xvi 2:26–34; Polybius v 80). It is particularly the names *migdōl* and *ba‘al ṣ’pōn* which have seemed to point to the northern coastal route. The former can be equated with a *migdōl* mentioned by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which appears from Ezek. xxix 10, xxx 6 to mark the northernmost extremity of Egypt just as *ṣ‘wēnēh* denotes its southern limit. This place can be more exactly located with the help of the *Itinerarium Antonini* (3rd century A.D.), which mentions a place MAGDOLVM twelve Roman miles from Pelusium,\footnote{O. Cuntz, *Itineraria Romana 1* (Leipzig, 1929), p. 23.} and the identification with Tell el-Ḥēr was favoured by Eissfeldt ([n. 1], p. 55) and Cazelles, the latter with some hesitation, as neither the topography nor early archaeological exploration of the site seemed to fit the requirements perfectly ([n. 1], p. 347; cf. p. 344). Baal Zaphon was shown by Eissfeldt (pp. 1–39) to be the Semitic antecedent of Zeus Casios, so that it is possible in principle that the Mount Casios on the Bardawil spit which is first mentioned by Herodotus (ii 6, 158, iii 5) in the mid-5th century B.C. had previously been known by, for example, Phoenician sailors as *ba‘al ṣ’pōn*. Opinions have differed over its precise location, ever since the early exploration by J. Clédat at the beginning of the century. Eissfeldt followed Clédat’s original view that Mount Casios was at Maḥammadiye at the western end of the spit, where a small temple was found on a hill 13 m. high, with two inscriptions from Hellenistic or Roman times bearing the name