THE DESERT SOJOURN OF THE HEBREWS AND THE SINAI-HOREB TRADITION

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In his work on ‘Monuments of the Lands and the History of Men’ 1), written in the beginning of the 14th century, the Arab writer Al-Qazwini adduces an interesting confirmation of the tradition of the ‘miraculous’ feeding of the Hebrews in the desert by quails. Describing a district Jifar in the vicinity of Al-Arish 2), Al-Qazwini refers to seasonal flights of birds of the quail species which migrate from Europe. This confirms the statement of Numbers xi 31 (J) 3), which alone mentions the most important fact that the quails came from the sea. Al-Qazwini goes on to record that the natives of the district killed the birds wholesale and preserved them in salt. Though Al-Qazwini does not mention it, the salt would probably be procured from the natural salt-pans of Lake Bardawil, the Sirbonian Bog of the classical writers, which has been taken by some authorities as the scene of the crossing of the ‘Sea of Reeds’ 4). The phenomenon of the quails, of course, is quite familiar in modern times, when the natives of the coast south of Gaza set up nets for the unfortunate migrants, which fly very low. Often indeed, no nets are necessary since the birds, after their long flight, alight on the point of exhaustion and cannot immediately take wing again. Before the late war thou-

1) Al-Qazwini, 'Asār al Bilād wa 'Abhār al 'ibād, ed. Wüstefeldt, Göttingen 1849.
2) Op. cit., p. 120.
3) Other references are Exodus xvi 13 (P), Psalm cv 10.
4) Brugsch, Egypt under the Pharaohs (E.T.), II, pp. 390 ff. Valuable local knowledge is given on the basis of personal experience by Jarvis, “The Forty Years Wandering of the Israelites”, PEQ, 1938, pp. 25-40. Eissfeldt locates the episode here in the vicinity of Baal Zephon, which was near Pelusium. Noting the difficulty of identifying Sabḥat al Bardawîl with Ḥaţ yān in passages where that term refers to the Gulf of Aqaba, he finds that in the earlier (prophetic) sources, as against the Deuteronomic passages and later psalms, there is no mention of Ḥaţ yān but simply of Ḫaţ. Baal Zaphon, Zeus Kasios und der Durchzug der Israeliten durchs Meer, 1932, pp. 39 ff.
sands of these poor creatures were slaughtered and sent by waggon-
loads to the towns of Palestine and Syria.

This small scrap of local knowledge has a definite bearing on the
question of the desert sojourn of the Hebrews before their settlement
in Palestine. Here is no reflection of a late tradition of the monarchic
period. From the time of their settlement in Palestine 1) the Hebrews
were effectively debarred from the coast, at least south of Jaffa, by
the Philistines, who obliged the tribe of Dan to migrate even from the
Judaean foothills twenty miles east of Jaffa 2). Nor could the He-
brews have known about the quails in the south of the Sinai penin-
sula. This precise piece of information about the migrant quails, in
fact, is further authentication of the tradition which associates the
Hebrews with the vicinity of Qadesh in the North Sinai desert.

In this connection we may cite the view of MOWINCKEL, who has
recently emphasized the significance of Qadesh in the Exodus tra-
dition 3). Like GRESSMANN 4), he finds that all the really concrete
traditions of the desert wanderings of the Hebrews are attached to
Qadesh, and all points which may with any probability be fixed
centre around Qadesh, which he identifies with the oasis around
'Ain Qedeirat 5). We may remark that such an oasis, though there is
no evidence that it was developed until the end of the first phase of
the Iron Age (c. 10th century 6)), was a more natural objective for
the fugitives from Egypt than the distant granite desert in the south
of the peninsula, where there were Egyptian mining camps and

1) We take the final and decisive phase of the Hebrew penetration of Palestine
as falling in the last quarter of the 13th century.
2) The distance from Jaffa to Sarah, the traditional home of Samson the Danite.
3) MOWINCKEL, “Kadesj, Sinai, og Jahve”, Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift, XI,
1942, pp. 1-32.
4) GRESSMANN, Mose und Seine Zeit, 1913, pp. 123 ff.
5) MOWINCKEL, op. cit., pp. 2-7.
6) LAWRENCE and WoOLLEY attest the remains of a fort here with sherds
which they date at the earliest ‘in the whole period 1800-900’, The Wilderness
of Zin, 1915, pp. 64 ff. GLUECK examined the site and on the evidence of the
surface pottery dated the fort between the 10th and the 8th centuries, AASOR,
XV, 1934, pp. 118-119. DE VAUX and SAVIGNAC find that the fort was built on an
earlier installation, though they find no evidence of Bronze Age occupation
(pre-12th century), “Nouvelles Recherches dans la Région de Cades”, RB,
XLVII, 1938, pp. 89-100. OLMSTEAD suggested that this was one of the migdaloth
built by Uzziah in the Negeb (2 Chronicles xxvi 10), History of Palestine and Syria,
1931, pp. 418-419. The pottery, however, suggests a date earlier than the time
of Uzziah and the fort may have been built by Solomon to guard the oasis, which
would be a vital entrepôt on an important trade-route from Aqaba to Palestine
and Egypt.