**The Secret of Baalbek**

**THE TEMPLE AT DAN**

The story of Jeroboam, son of a widow of Zereda, an Ephraimite and Solomon’s servant, begins with this passage:

Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David, his father.  
And the man, Jeroboam, was a mighty man of valor; and Solomon, seeing the young man that he was industrious, made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph.[1](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "1)

The ambitious servant was not satisfied with this honor of administering the land of Menashe (Manasse) and Ephraim, or even the entire northern half of the kingdom; he wished to be a king himself. When Jeroboam’s plans became known to Solomon, the king intended to kill him, but Jeroboam ran away to the Pharaoh of Egypt. When Solomon died, he returned; he tore the ten tribes’ land from Rehoboam, son of Solomon. Solomon’s realm was split in two: Jeroboam became king of Israel in the north, and Rehoboam retained the kingdom of Judah in the south. To make the rift permanent Jeroboam had to keep the people from going to Jerusalem and its new temple.

And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David.

If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam, king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam, king of Judah.[2](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "2)

From the viewpoint of serving his own ends, it was a sound idea to build on some ancient sites places for folk gathering which would compete with Jerusalem.

Whereupon the king [Jeroboam] took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto [his people]. It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem . . .

And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan.[3](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "3)

Beth-El was in the south of his kingdom, close to Jerusalem, Dan in the north of his kingdom. In order to attract pilgrims from the land of Judah, Jeroboam also made Beth-El the site of a new feast, “like unto the feast that is in Judah”.[4](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "4) Setting up the image of the cult in Dan, Jeroboam proclaimed: “Behold thy gods, O Israel, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.“[5](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "5) Thus, Dan in the north competed with Jerusalem in the days of Passover and Tabernacles. The temple of Dan was a much larger edifice than the temple in Bethel, and it became a great place for pilgrimage, attracting people even from the southern kingdom.

And this thing became a sin; for the people went to worship before the one [of the two calves], even unto Dan.[6](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "6)

The temple of Dan was called a “House of High Places” : “And he made an house of high places . . .” [7](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "7) The Temple of Jerusalem was also called a “House” in Hebrew.

For centuries the temple of Dan in the north successfully contested with the Temple of Jerusalem, and attracted throngs of pilgrims.

Jeroboam, the man who supervised under Solomon the building of Millo, the fortress of Zion with its strong wall, and who, in recognition of his ability demonstrated in this work, was appointed governor of the northern provinces, now, when king, must have desired to erect in Dan a temple surpassing the magnificent Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Only in offering a more imposing building could he hope not only to turn the people from going to Jerusalem, but make the people of Judah elect a pilgrimage to Dan over one to Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Jeroboam had seen the temples and palaces of Egypt, and his ambition was, of course, to imitate all the splendor he had seen in Jerusalem, in Karnak, and in Deir el-Bahari. Or would this “mighty man of valor”, industrious constructor of Zion’s citadel, and a shrewd politician, try to contest the Temple of Jerusalem by means of an ignoble chapel? That he succeeded in his challenge is a testimony to the size and importance of the temple at Dan.

It was not enough that Dan and Beth-El were ancient places of reverence: magnificence was displayed in the capital of Solomon, and magnificence had to prevail in the temple cities of the Northern Kingdom.

The temple of Beth-El, the smaller of the two Israelite temples, was demolished three centuries later by King Josiah, a few decades before the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. It was trampled into smithereens by the king, jealous for his God.[8](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "8) There is no mention of a destruction of the temple in Dan. Where was Dan and its “House of High Places” ?

**THE SEARCH FOR DAN**

Dan was the northernmost point of the Israelite settlement where one of the twelve tribes chose its domicile. A familiar expression was: “From Dan even to Beer-Sheba.” [9](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "9)

Students of biblical geography have agreed to place Dan in the Arab village of el-Kadi, on the upper flow of the Jordan, which is there but a rivulet. In recent years very insignificant ancient ruins have been found on this place.[10](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "10) This is in accord with what the biblical archaeologists expect, for they think the temple of Dan to have been a very modest structure of which, most probably, hardly any ruins would have remained.

The biblical Dan is placed on the upper flow of the Jordan because of a passage in Josephus Flavius. In his *Jewish Antiquities,* Josephus says that Dan was on “a spot not far from Mount Libanus and the sources of the lesser Jordan”.[11](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "11) Commentators of Josephus deduced that by the “lesser Jordan” the upper flow of the Jordan, above the Lake of Huleh, or above the Lake of Tiberias, is meant; however, this interpretation is not supported by the words “not far from Mount Libanus” since, from the surroundings of el-Kadi and the sources of the Jordan, the snow-capped Hermon or Anti-Lebanon can be seen in the distance, but not Lebanon, far behind the Anti-Lebanon.

After having chosen the source of the Jordan as the area where to look for Dan, this ancient city was located at el-Kadi for the following reason: the name Dan is built of the Hebrew root that signifies “to counsel” or “to judge”. El-Kadi means in Arabic “the judge”. There was no other reason, beside this philological equation of Hebrew and Arabic terms, to locate the site of the ancient temple city in the small village of el-Kadi, since—until quite recently—no ruins, large or small, were found on the site.

The aforementioned reference in Josephus makes one wonder whether by “the lesser Jordan” the river Litani was meant. This river begins in the valley between Mount Lebanon and Mount Anti-Lebanon, flows to the south in the same rift in which farther to the south the Jordan flows, and towards the source of that river, but changes its course and flows then westwards and empties itself into the Mediterranean. Its source being near Mount Lebanon, it appears that the Litani was meant by “the lesser Jordan”.

However, Josephus, who wrote in the first century of the Christian era, was not necessarily well-informed concerning the location of Dan - the temple city of the Northern Kingdom - a state whose history ended with the capture of Samaria by Sargon II in -722.[12](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "12)

Therefore, it is only proper to go back to the Scriptures in trying to locate Dan.

**THE PORTION OF THE CHILDREN OF DAN**

When the Israelites, after the Exodus from Egypt, roamed in the wilderness, they sent scouts to Canaan to investigate the land and to report. The scouts passed the land through its length “from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath”.[13](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "13) These were also destined to be the southern and northern borders of the land: “Your south quarter shall be from the wilderness of Zin” and in the north “your border [shall be] unto the entrance of Hamath”.[14](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "14)

The expressions “as men come to Hamath”, or “unto the entrance of Hamath” signify that Rehob, the northern point of the land visited by the scouts, was at a place where the road began that led to the city of Hamath in Syria.

In the days of conquest under Joshua son of Nun, when the land was partitioned by lot, the tribe of Dan received its portion in the hilly country on the road from Jerusalem to Jaffa. The tribe was opposed by the Philistines, also invading the same country. When the population of Philistia increased through the arrival of new immigrants from the Mediterranean islands, the tribe of Dan, being the advance guard of the Israelites, had to suffer not mere resistance, but strong counter-pressure. The Samson saga reflects this struggle. Tired of continuously opposing the increasing influx of the Philistines, the Danites migrated to the north.

They . . . came unto Laish, unto a people who were quiet and secure; and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burned the city with fire.

And there was no deliverer, because it was far from Zidon, and they had no business with any man; and it was in the valley that lieth by Beth-Rehob. And they built a city, and dwelt therein.

And they called the name of the city Dan . . . howbeit, the name of the city was Laish at the first.[15](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "15)

Here we meet again the northern point Rehob or Beth-Rehob. We are also told that it was situated in a valley. Next to it was the city of Laish, and the Danites burned the city and then erected there a new city, Dan.

Beth-Rehob, or House of Rehob, is the place we met—in the story of the scouts sent by Moses—as the most remote point they visited going to the north.

The place was “far from Zidon” ; if it were where it is looked for today—at the source of the Jordan—it would not have been proper to say “far from Zidon”. but rather “from Tyre”. But if Zidon (Sidon) is named as the nearest large city. Tyre must have been still farther from Laish-Dan, and the latter city must have been more to the north, in the valley between Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon.

The Danites were in contact with the Zidonians already at the time when they fought with the Philistines for the possession of territory. Because of want of land, they sent many of their sons as sailors on Phoenician ships.[16](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "16) In their new place of abode the Danites became kindred with the Phoenicians.

In Dan-Laish, “the children of Dan set up the graven image” of Micah.[17](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "17) The story of this holy image is connected with the migration of the Danites to the north. Before migrating they sent a few men to find for them “an inheritance to dwell in’”.[18](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "18) These men traversed, on their errand, the mountainous land of Ephraim. Micah was an Ephraimite who built a private chapel in Mount Ephraim, where he placed “a graven image and a molten image”, and hired a Levite to serve there as a priest.[19](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "19) The men of Dan, dispatched on the errand to find a new domicile for the tribe, heard an oracle from the priest. After having spied the place of Laish, they returned to their tribe that dwelt in the hilly borderland of Zarah, and with six hundred warriors went to the north. Passing again Mount Ephraim, they took with them the image and the priest, despite the bitter protests of Micah. When they conquered Laish “the children of Dan set up the graven image”.[20](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "20) Since then, there was an oracle in Dan.

The name Dan-jaan, found in the Scriptures,[21](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "21) is apparently a synonym for Dan: it means “Dan of answer”, or “of oracle”.

Dan became the site of the temple built by Jeroboam. It was a holy place long before he built his temple there, since the story of the oracle of Micah is conspicuously narrated in the Book of Judges; it is rather probable that Rehob was a sacred place even before the Danites built their city on the ruins of Laish close by.

It cannot be said of the present village of el-Kadi that it lies on the road “as men come to Hamath” ; to satisfy this description, Rehob must be looked for farther to the north.

**THE SUCCESSORS OF JEROBOAM**

Being located in an outstretched part of the Israelite kingdom, Dan was often the subject of wars between the kings of Damascus and of Israel. Shortly after the death of Jeroboam, the temple city was conquered by the king of Damascus.[22](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "22) It appears that, at the time of the revolution of Jehu, three generations later, in the ninth century, Dan was still in the hands of the kings of Damascus; but it is said that Jehu, who destroyed the temple of Baal in Samaria, did not destroy the temple of Dan, nor did he abolish its cult, “the sin of Jeroboam”. This implies that Dan came back into the hands of the Israelites in the days of Jehu. In any case, the population of the northern kingdom -that of Israel—but also of the southern kingdom - that of Judah-continued to go to Dan on the feasts of Passover and Tabernacles, preferring it to Jerusalem.

Jehu, jealous of the God Yahweh, did nothing to keep the people from going to Dan, and obviously even encouraged them to do so; the cult of Dan was one of Yahweh, though in the guise of a calf, or Apis.

In the eighth century the prophet Amos, one of the earliest prophets whose speeches are preserved in writing, spoke of the worship at Dan:

They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy god, O Dan liveth; and, The manner of Beer-Sheba liveth; even they shall fall, and never rise up again.[23](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "23)

For a time Amos prophesied at Beth-El, the other sacred site of the Northern Kingdom. In his time the place had a royal chapel; and in view of the statement that, of the two places where Jeroboam placed the calves, the people went to worship in Dan,[24](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "24) apparently the chapel of Beth-El remained a minor sacrarium and did not attract many worshippers.

Hosanna, another prophet who lived in the eighth century, admonished: “Let not Judah offend . . . neither go yea up to Beethoven.” [25](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "25) He prophesied also that the “inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beethoven”, and that the glory of that place will depart from it.[26](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "26)

It is generally agreed that Hosea, speaking of Beth-Aven (“the House of Sin” ), referred to Beth-El This is supported by the verse in the Book of Joshua which tells: “And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth-Aven, on the east side of Beth-El” [27](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "27)

It appears that the name Beth-Aven, or “The House of Sin” was applied to both places where Jeroboam built temples for the worship of the calf. It is possible that, in another verse of his, Hosea had in mind the temple of Dan; he said: “The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed . . .” [28](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "28)

“The sin of Israel” is the usual term for the cult of Dan; and the “high places”, according to the quoted story of Jeroboam placing calves in Dan and Beth-El,[29](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "29) were built in Dan.

At the beginning of the Book of Amos, the following sentence appears: “I will break also the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven *(me’bik’at Aven)* . . . and the people of Syria shall go into captivity unto Kir . . .“[30](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "30)

I shall return later to this passage and to the accepted interpretation of “the plain of Aven”.

During the wars of the eighth century, the temple city of Dan may have taken part in the struggle of the Northern Kingdom for its existence, being oppressed first by Syria, and then by Assyria. Dan may have been besieged, and may have changed hands during these wars, but nothing is known of its destruction.

In the latter part of the eighth century the population of the Northern Kingdom was deported by Sargon II to remote countries, from where it did not return. More than a century later Jeremiah referred to the oracle of Dan: “For a voice declareth from Dan”,[31](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "31) which shows that the oracle of Dan was still in existence after the end of the Northern Kingdom.

An oracle venerated since ancient times, a magnificent temple where the image of a calf was worshipped, a place where the tribes of Israel gathered in the days of the feasts, and the people ofJudea used to come, too—this was the cult.

On the way to Hamath, on the northern frontier of the Northern Kingdom, closer to Zidon (Sidon) than to Tyre, and strategically exposed to Damascus—this was the place. Would no ruins help to identify the site?

**BAALBEK**

In the valley that gives birth to two rivers of Syria—the Orontes flowing to the north, and the Litani flowing to the south and west, between the mountains of Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, where roads from Palestine in the south, Damascus in the east, and the sea-coast on the west meet and run from there to Hamath in Upper Syria—lie the ruins of Baalbek.

“When we compare the ruins of Baalbek with those of many ancient cities which we visited in Italy, Greece, Egypt, and in other parts of Asia (and Africa), we cannot help thinking them to be the remains of the boldest plan we ever saw attempted in architecture. Is it not strange then, that the age and the undertaker of the works, in which solidity and duration have been so remarkably consulted, should be a matter of such obscurity. . .?[32](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "32)

From the time when this was first written, in the fifties of the eighteenth century, and till today, nothing was added to dispel the obscurity which envelops the origin of this temple city.[33](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "33) The excavations undertaken there brought no solution to the problem of its origin or the nature of its cult.[34](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "34) No early inscriptions were found.

Throngs of travelers who spend their day wandering among the ruins of a magnificent acropolis go away without having heard what the role of the place was in ancient times, when it was built, or who was the builder. The pyramids, the temples of Kamak and Luxor, the Forum and Circus Maximus in Rome were erected by builders whose identity is generally known. The marvellous site in the valley on the junction of roads running to Hamath is a work of anonymous authors in unknown ages. It is as if some mysterious people brought the mighty blocks and placed them at the feet and in front of the snow-capped Lebanon, and went away unnoticed. The inhabitants of the place actually believe that the great stones were brought and put together by Djenoun, mysterious creatures, intermediate between angels and demons.[35](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "35)

**SOLOMON’S BAALBEK**

Local tradition, which may be traced to the early Middle Ages, points to a definite period in the past when Baalbek was built: the time of Solomon.

Ildrisi, the Arab traveler and geographer (1099-1154), wrote: “The great (temple-city) of astonishing appearance was built in the time of Solomon.” [36](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "36) Gazwini (d. 1823 or 4) explained the origin of the edifices and the name of the place by connecting it with Balkis, the legendary Queen of the South, and with Solomon.[37](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "37)

The traveler Benjamin of Tudela wrote in the year 1160 of his visit to Baalbek: “This is the city which is mentioned in Scripture as Baalath in the vicinity of the Lebanon, which Solomon built for the daughter of Pharaoh. The place is constructed with stones of enormous size.” [38](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "38)

Robert Wood, who stayed at Baalbek in the 1750’s, and who published an unsurpassed monograph on its ruins, wrote: “The inhabitants of this country, Mohomedans, Jews and Christians, all confidently believe that Solomon built both, Palmyra and Baalbek.” [39](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "39) Another traveler who visited Syria in the eighties of the eighteenth century recorded: ‘The inhabitants of Baalbek assert that this edifice was constructed by Djenoun, or genies in the service of King Solomon.” [40](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "40)

**ON - AVEN**

The identification of Bikat Aven, referred to in Amos 1:5 with the plain of Coele-Syria is generally accepted.[41](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "41) The text, already quoted, reads: “I will break also the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven . . .”

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible by the Seventy, renders the above text as “the valley of On,” written the same as On (or Heliopolis) in Egypt. The Hebrew spellings of Aven and On do not differ in consonants; and vocals were inserted in the texts by the Masoretes in a late period. On is the Hebrew name of Heliopolis in Egypt, pronounced also as Aven, as in Ezekiel 30:17; Bikat Aven is the name of the plain of Baalbek in Amos. Tradition has it also that the cult of Baalbek was brought there from Heliopolis in Egypt.[42](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "42)

Hosea, however, called by the name of Aven (Beth-Aven) the cities of Bethel and Dan;[43](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "43) and he spoke of “high places” there, and in the instance where he referred to “the sin of Israel” he obviously meant Dan.[44](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "44)

Amos, who in the eighth chapter speaks against the worshippers at Dan, in chapter one speaks against the plain of Aven—and thus, comparing Hosea and Amos, one wonders whether Amos 1:5 speaks of Baalbek or of Dan.

The expression Bikat Aven, or the Valley (Plain) of Aven in Amos impelled the exegetes and commentators to refer the place to Coele-Syria, and this because Bi’qa is the specific name of the Coele-Syrian plain—still in use today. The very name Baalbek is generally explained as the Baal of Bi’qa or Bekaa—of the valley.

Baalbek is situated in the valley between Lebanon and Hermon. Of Dan it is also said that it was situated in a valley:

”. . . And it was in the valley that lieth by Beth-Rehob. And they built a city, and dwelt therein.” [45](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "45)

**BAALATH, BAAL GAD, BAAL ZAPHON, BAAL MELECH**

Is Baalbek the Scriptural Baalath, as Benjamin of Tudela thought? About Baalath it is said: “And Solomon built . . . Baalath, and Tadmor in the wilderness.” [46](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "46) Tadmor is Palmyra, far to the northeast of Baalbek. Baalath is said to have belonged to the tribe of Dan.[47](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "47)

Or, is Baalbek the Scriptural Baal Gad? deliberated a few scholars.[48](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "48) It is said: “Baal Gad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon.” [49](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "49) In the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon lies Baalbek. If this identification is correct then Baalbek was inside the Israelite kingdom. However, against this supposition of Baal Gad in the valley of Lebanon it was argued that the Israelite kingdom never embraced the area of Coele-Syria, or the valley between Lebanon and Hermon (Anti-Lebanon).[50](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "50)

Some writers would regard Baalath and Baal Gad as two names of one place and would locate it at Baalbek.[51](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "51)

If Solomon built in Palmyra in the desert between Syria and Mesopotamia, the region of Coele-Syria between Lebanon and Hermon could certainly be in the area of his building activity, argued these scholars. But placing Baal Gad in Coele-Syria, where would they place Dan, the northernmost point of the Kingdom of Israel? To keep Dan in Galilee and to place Baal Gad, an Israelite city, one hundred fifty kilometers farther to the north will not stand up against the indisputable fact that Dan was the northernmost city in Israel.

Some scholars, looking for Baalbek in the Scriptures, identified it with Baal-Hamon, referred to in the *Song of Songs.*[52](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "52) And again, Baal Hamon is supposed to be another name for Baalath and Baal Gad.[53](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "53)

Also Baal Zaphon, or Zeus Cassius, was proposed as Baalbek.[54](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "54) In this connection it can be said that, according to the Talmud, Gad was the name of the planet Jupiter;[55](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "55) and Zeus Cassius signifies Jupiter of Lebanon; and Hamon was supposed to be a Syrian form of the name Amon[56](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "56) who, according to the Greek authors, was Zeus-Jupiter.[57](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "57)

All this together, if correct, points toward the cult of Jupiter in Baalbek, a matter to which we shall return in one of the next sections.

Besides Baal Gad, Baal Zaphon or Zeus Cassius, Baal Hamon, and Baalath, one more name is identified as Baalbek: Baalmelech, or “the royal Baal”.[58](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "58)

**THE TRILITHON**

Already in the last century it was observed that the Acropolis of

Baalbek and the temples built on it date from different epochs. The massive substratum—the great base of the acropolis—appears to be of an earlier date; the three temples on the substratum, of a later date.

It is even probable that the wall of the acropolis did not originate in one epoch. Among the stones of which it is built there are three of an unusual size—almost twenty meters long. Each of them weighs about one thousand tons. These huge monoliths are incased in the wall. The question arises whether they are not the survivals of the original cyclopean structure—that which carried the name Rehob, or Beth-Rehob, and which served as a landmark for the scouts dispatched by Moses in their survey of Canaan, and for the emissaries of the tribe of Dan in their search for the territory in the north. Like Stonehenge in Great Britain, or Tiahuanaco in the Andes, it may have originated in an early time—not necessarily neolithic, since it appears that these stones are subjected to hewing by metal tools.

In the quarry a mile away is found another stone of comparable size, cut out of the rock from all but one side; it appears that this stone of more perfect cut was quarried in a later time, possibly in the days of Jeroboam, or even later; but, for probably mechanical considerations, the work was not finished and the stone not removed, and the emulation of the early builders not completed.[59](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "59)

In another place I intend to return to the problem of the Trilithon of Baalbek, when treating cyclopean buildings and the mechanical means of quarrying and transporting these monoliths.

**THE EMBOSSED QUADERS**

Aside from the incased trilithon, the attention of the visitor to Baalbek who inspects the wall of the acropolis is drawn to stones of a bossed shape with an indented rim on all four sides of the face of the stone.

O. von Richter in 1822[60](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "60) and S. Wolcott in 1843[61](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "61) drew attention to the fact that the quaders of the wall of the temple area of the acropolis of Baalbek have the same form as the quaders of the Temple of Solomon, namely, of the surviving western (outer) wall, or Wailing Wall. The Roman architects, wrote Wolcott, never built foundations or walls of such stones; and of the Israelite period it is especially the age of Solomon that shows this type of stone shaping (chiseling). The photograph of the outer wall of Baalbek’s temple area illustrates that the same art of chiseling was employed in the preparation of stones for its construction. Whatever the time of construction of other parts of Baalbek’s compound—neolithic, Israelite, Syrian, Greek, or Roman—this fundamental part of the compound must have originated in the same century as the surviving (western) wall of the area of Solomon’s temple.

**THE TEMPLES OF THE ACROPOLIS**

The buildings on the flat plateau of the Acropolis have columns with capitals of Corinthian style. The time of the origin of these temples is disputed. An author of the last century[62](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "62) brought forth his arguments against a late date for the temples atop the acropolis; he would not agree to ascribe them to the Roman period, or Greek period; he dated them as originating in an early Syrian period: the Romans only renovated these buildings in the second century of the present era.

The opinions of scholars are divided over whether these buildings can be ascribed to Roman times, though the source of the designs on the doorways and the ceiling and in the capitals of the columns speak for a Roman origin. When the Roman authorship of the buildings is denied, the Romans are credited only with renovating the structures.

The Emperor who is sometimes said to have built the largest of the temples in the temple area—that of Jupiter—is Aelius Antoninus Pius (138-161). The source of this information is the history of John of Antioch, surnamed Malalas, who lived not earlier than in the seventh century of this era, and wrote that Antoninus Pius built a temple for Jupiter at Heliopolis, near the Lebanon in Phoenicia, which was one of the wonders of the world.[63](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "63)

Julius Capitolinus, who wrote the annals of Antoninus Pius and enumerated the buildings he erected, offers no material support for the assertion made by the Syrian writer of the early Middle Ages. Though Antoninus Pius did build in Baalbek, as is evidenced by his inscriptions found there,[64](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "64) his activity was restricted to reparation of the temples or the construction of one of the edifices in the temple area.[65](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "65) The work in its entirety could not have been his because Lucian, his contemporary, calls the sanctuary of Baalbek already ancient, and because Pompey had already found it in existence and Trajan consulted its oracle.

The style of the temples caused the same divergence of opinion as the style of the surviving ruins of Palmyra. Some regard them as Roman,[66](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "66) others as Hellenistic and Oriental.[67](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "67) They are sometimes called East-Roman.[68](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "68) In the case that only the ornamentation is of the Roman period the question may arise whether the walls and the columns of these buildings could be of as early a period as the seventh century before the present era, or the time of Manasseh, of whom Pseudo-Hippolytus says that he reconstructed Baalbek, built originally in the time of Solomon.[69](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "69)

**THE CALF**

It was almost a common feature in all places where pilgrims gathered to worship at a local cult that diminutive images of the deity were offered for sale to them. Also small figures of the god or of his emblem in precious or semi-precious metals were brought by worshippers as a donation to the temple where the large scale figure had its domicile.

In Baalbek archaeological work produced very few sacred objects or figures that could shed light on the worship of the local god. “It was a disappointment, next to the brilliant success of so rich an excavation, that nothing was learned of the nature of the deity and the history of its worship.” [70](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "70)

Figures of Jupiter Heliopolitanus standing between two bullocks or calves have been found at Baalbek, dating from Roman times.[71](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "71) In addition, an image of a calf was also found.

The only figure of an earlier time found in Baalbek is an image of a calf. Since it is to be expected that images found in an ancient temple are reproductions of the main deity worshipped in the holy enclosure, it is significant that the holy image in the temple of Baalbek was that of a calf, and of no other animal.

The name Baal-Bek (Baal-Bi’qa) is sometimes transmitted by Arab authors *as Baal bikra,* or Baal of the Steer or Calf, which is the way of folk etymology to adapt the name to the form of the worship practiced in the temple. This, together with the finding of the images of the calf in the area of the temple, strengthens the impression that the god of Baalbek was a calf.

**THE ORACLE OF BAALBEK**

Baalbek or, as the Romans called it, Heliopolis, was venerated in the Roman world as the place of an old cult of an ancient oracle, and it rivalled successfully other venerated temples of the Roman Empire.

It is known that the Emperor Trajan, before going to war against the Parthians in the year 115, wrote to the priests of Baalbek and questioned its oracle. The oracle remained in high esteem at least as late as the fourth century of the present era, when Macrobius in his *Saturnalia* wrote of Baalbek: “This temple is also famous for its oracles.” [72](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "72)

Was it the ancient oracle of Micah? In the words of Jeremiah, shortly before the Babylonian exile of -586 in which he spoke of “a voice . . . from Dan”,[73](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "73) we had the last biblical reference to the oracle of Micah. In the days of Jeremiah the oracle must have been seven or eight hundred years old. Did it survive until the days of Trajan and even later, until the days of Macrobius?

In the Tractate Pesahim of the Babylonian Talmud is written the following sentence: “The image of Micah stands in Bechi.” [74](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "74) Bechi is known as the Hebrew name for Baalbek in the time of the Talmud. As we have seen, in the Book of Exodus it is recounted that the Danites, migrating to the North, took with them Micah and his idol, and that it was placed in Dan of the North. The Talmud was composed between the second and the fifth centuries of the present era.

This passage in the Tractate Pesahim is a stong argument for the thesis of this essay, namely that Baalbek is the ancient Dan.[75](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/baalbek.htm" \l "75)

**TWO PROBLEMS: ASUMMARY**

The problems will be put side by side. Dan was the abode of the old oracle of Micah. Jeroboam built there a “house of high places”, or a temple. Previously, he was the builder of Jerusalem’s wall under Solomon; before becoming king of the Northern Kingdom he lived as an exile in Egypt. He introduced the cult of the calf in Dan.

The new temple was built to contest and to surpass the temple of Jerusalem. It became the gathering place of the Ten Tribes, or “the sin of Israel”, and pilgrims from Judah also went there.

The prophets, who opposed the cult of Dan, called the place Aven, like Aven, or On (Heliopolis) in Egypt.

Its oracle was still active in the days of Jeremiah, in the beginning of the sixth century.

Dan was the northernmost city of the Kingdom of the Ten Tribes, and the capital of the tribe of Dan. It was situated in a valley. If Baal Gad, between the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon was not the same place, Dan must have been more to the north.

The place was at the point where the roads meet that run toward Hamath.

No ruins of this temple-city are found. Where was Dan and its temple?

\* \* \*

Remains of a great temple-city are preserved in Baalbek. At the beginning of the present era it was described as already ancient. It bore the name of Heliopolis, like the Egyptian On, or Aven (Ezekiel); and Amos, who spoke against the worshippers at Dan, prophesied the desolation of Bikat-Aven, or the Valley of Baalbek.

Its cult was introduced from Egypt. During excavations, the figure of a calf was unearthed.

The temple possessed an old oracle. The Talmud contains the information that the oracle of Micah (which according to the Book of Judges was in Dan) stands in Baalbek.

Local tradition assigns the building of the temple of Baalbek to the time of Solomon. The wall of the temple area is built of great stone blocks of the same peculiar shape as those of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, the remains of the outer wall of the temple area erected by Solomon.

Baalbek lies in a valley (Bi’qa) between the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon, and on the junction of the roads that connect Beirut from the west and Damascus from the east with Hamath in the north.

The history of the temple-city of Baalbek in pre-Roman times is not known, neither is its builder known, nor the time when it was built.

\* \* \*

Two problems—when was Baalbek built and who was its builder, and where was Dan and what was the fate of its temple—have a common answer.

The tradition as to the age of the acropolis and temple area of Baalbek is not wrong. Only a few years after Solomon’s death the house of the high places of Dan-Baalbek was built by Jeroboam.\* Possibly, Solomon had already built a chapel for the oracle, besides the palace for his Egyptian wife.

The *Djenoun* who, according to Arab tradition, built Baalbek for Solomon were apparently the tribesmen of Dan. In the Hebrew tradition, too, the tribesmen of Dan, because of the type of worship in their capital, were regarded as evil spirits. In the corrupted name of Delebore, who, according to Macrobius, was the king who built Baalbek and introduced there the cult of Heliopolis from Egypt, it is possible to recognize the name of Jeroboam who actually returned from Egypt before he built “the house of the high places”.

   \* \* \*

**EDITORIAL POSTSCRIPT:**

*Velikovsky’s essay on Baalbek was planned to include a discussion of the names by which this place was known in Egyptian texts. This part was not written, but a few notes of his, scattered among his papers, may help us to follow his reasoning. One note reads: “Dunip (Tunip) of the el-Amarna letters and other ancient sources was Dan. It was also Kadesh of Seti’s conquest. Finally, the place is known as Yenoam (’Yahwe speaks’) which refers to the oracle.”*

**Tunip:***As Velikovsky noted in “From the End of the Eighteenth Dynasty to the Time of Ramses II” (KRONOS III.:3, p. 32)* *certain scholars (e.g., Gauthier) have identified Tunip with Baalbek, though others (e.g., Astour) have disputed the link. Thutmose III recorded the capture of Tunip in the 29th year of his reign; an inscription recounts the Egyptian king’s entering the chamber of offerings and making sacrifices of oxen, calves, etc. toAmon and Harmachis. The el-Amarna letters indicate that the same gods were worshipped at Tunip as in Egypt.*

*On the walls of a Theban tomb of the time of Thutmose III (that of Menkheperre-Seneb), among paintings of foreigners of various nations, there is one of a personage from Tunip, carrying a child in his arms. Velikovsky thought that, possibly, it was a depletion of Jeroboam, and that the painting illustrated the passage in the First Book of Kings (II :40): “And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak, king of Egypt. . .”*

*Among the considerations which led Velikovsky to identify Tunip with Dan-Baalbek were (1) Tunip was located in the general area of Baalbek, with some scholars asserting that the two were one and the same. (2) There was a temple of Amon at Tunip; the Roman equivalent of Amon - Jupiter - was worshipped at Baalbek.*

**Kadesh of Seti’s Conquest**: *This identification was given in brief in Velikovsky’s article in KRONOS III:3, mentioned above. The relevant passage reads: “There is a mural that shows Seti capturing a city called Kadesh. Modern scholars recognized that this Kadesh or Temple City was not the Kadesh mentioned in the annals of Thutmose. Whereas the Kadesh of Thutmose was in southern Palestine, the Kadesh of Seti was in Coele-Syria. The position of the northern city suggested that it was Dunip, the site of an Amon temple built in the days of Thutmose III. Dunip, in its turn, was identified with Baalbek.”*

*Pseudo-Hippolytus (Sermo in Sancta Theophania in J. -P. Migne, Patrologiae Cursus Completus [Graeca] Vol. 10, col. 705) gives the information that Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, restored Baalbek. In his forthcoming Assyrian Conquest, Velikovsky suggests that this could have been a reward for Manasseh for his “loyalty to the Assyrian-Egyptian axis”.*

**Yenoam:** *Regarding Yenoam, I find only the following among Velikovsky’s notes: “Yenoam-Dan (Yehu probably introduced the cult of Yahwe at Dan).” Yenoam, read in Hebrew, could be interpreted as “Ye [Yahwe] speaks”; Velikovsky evidently saw in the name a reference to the oracle at Dan. Yenoam is mentioned among the towns taken by Thutmose III (he captured it soon after taking Megiddoj. In the el-Amarna letter no. 197 there is a reference to a town named Yanuammu. Later, Seti recorded the despatching of an army against Yenoam, in the first year ofhis reign. Yenoam is once again mentioned on Merneptah’s so-called Israel Stele; the claim is that it was “made non-existent.” In* Ramses II and His Time *this deed is ascribed to Nebuchadnezzar.*

- Jan Sammer

References

1. I Kings 11:27, 28.
2. I Kings 12:26, 27.
3. I Kings 12:28, 29.
4. I Kings 12:32. 33.
5. I Kings 12:28.
6. I Kings 12:30.
7. I Kings 12:31.
8. II Kings 23: 15.
9. Judges 20:1; I Samuel 3:20.
10. See *Israel Exploration Journal,* Vol. 16 (1966), pp. 144-145; *ibid*., vol. 19 (1969), pp. 121-123. [In 1980, an arched city gate was reportedly uncovered at this site. - LER]
11. *Anriquities* V.3.i.
12. Similarly, the passage in *the Book of Enoch* (13:7), which refers to Dan to the “south of the western side of Hermon” must not be treated as an historical location.
13. Numbers 13:21.
14. Numbers 34:3,7-8.
15. Judges 18:27-29.
16. Judges5:17.
17. Judges 18:30.
18. Judges 18:1.
19. Judges 17:4, 7-13.
20. Judges 18:30.
21. Samuel 24:6.
22. Kings 15:20.
23. Amos 8: 14.
24. I Kings 12:30.
25. Hosea 4:15.
26. Hosea 10:5.
27. Joshua 7:2; cf. Joshua 18:11-12: “and the lot . . . of Benjamin . . . and their border . . . at the wilderness of Beth-Aven.” Cf. also I Samuel 13:5 and 14:23.
28. Hosea 10:18.
29. I Kings 12:28-30.
30. Amos 1:5.
31. Jeremiah 4:15.
32. Robert Wood, *The Ruins of Palmyra and Baalbek* (Royal Geographical Society, London, 1827), Vol. Ill, p. 58; first published as *The Ruinen of Baalbec* (1757).
33. “Wir wissen aussert wenig von dem Schicksal Baalbeks in Altertum”, O. Puchstein, *Führer durch die Ruinen von Baalbek* (Berlin, 1905), pp. 3-4.
34. “Es war leider bei den an glanzenden Erfolgen so reichen Ausgrabungen eine Enttauschung, dass sie uber das Wesen des Gottes und die Geschichte seiner Verehrung nichts gelehrt hat.” H. Winnefeld, *Baalbek, Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen von 1895-1905,* ed. by Th. Wiegand, Vol. II (Berlin, 1923), p. 110.
35. C. F. Volney, *Voyage en Syrie et en Egypte, pendent les années 1783-1785* (Paris, 1787), p. 224.
36. Idrisi in P. Jaubert, *Geographie d’Edrisi* (Paris, 1836-1840), I, p. 353; quoted by C. *Ritter, Die Erdkunde,* Vol. XVII (Berlin, 1854), p. 224.
37. Al-Qazwini Zakariya ibn Muhammad, *Kosmographie,* H. F. Wüstenfeld ed. (Berlin, 1848-49), II, p. 104.
38. A. Asher tr. and ed.. *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* (N.Y. 1840-41).
39. *R.Wood, TheRuins of Palmyran Baalbek* (London, 1827),p.58.
40. C. F. Volney, *op. cit.,* p. 224.
41. E. Robinson, *Biblical Researches in Palestine and the Adjacent Regions* (London, 1874), Vol. Ill, pp. 519-520.
42. Lucian, *De Dea Syria,* par. 5; *Macrobius, Saturnalia* I. 23: Assyrii quoque Solem sub nomine Jovis, quem Dia Heliopoliten cognominant, maximis ceremoniis in civitate, que Heliopolis nuncupatur. Ejus dei simulacrum sumtum est de oppido Aegypti, quod et ipsum Heliopolis apellatur, regnante apud Aegyptios Senemure; perlatum est primum in eam per Opiam, legatum Deleboris, regis Assyriorum, sacerdotesque Aegyptios, quorum princeps fuit Partemetis, diuque habitum apud Assyrios, postea Heliopolim commigravit.
43. Hosea 10:5.
44. Hosea 10:8.
45. Judges 18:28.
46. I Kings 9:17-18.
47. Joshua 19:44.
48. Michaelis, *Supplementa ad lexica hebraica* (Gottingen, 1784-1792), pp. 197-201; Ritter, *Die Erdkunde,* Vol. XVII, pp. 229-230; E. F. C. Rosenmüller, *The Biblical Geography of Asia Minor, Phoenicia and Arabia,* tr.by N. Morren (Edinburgh, 1841), 1. ii., pp. 280-281; W. H. Thomson, “Baalbek” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (14th ed.), Vol. II, p. 835.
49. Joshua ll:17;cf. St. Jerome, *Onomastica,* article “Baalgad”.
50. E. Meyer, *Geschichte des Alterthums,* Vol. I (first ed., Berlin, 1884), p. 364, note; Robinson*, Biblical Researches,* III, p. 410, n. 2.
51. Cf. Robinson, *Biblical Researches,* III, p. 519; Ritter, *Die* *Erdkunde* Vol. XVII, pp. 229-230.
52. *Song of Songs* 8:11.
53. G. H. von Schubert, *Reise in das Morgenland in den Jahren 1836 und 1837* (Erlangen, 1838, 1839); Wilson*, Lands of the Bible,* Vol. II, p. 384.
54. O. Eissfeldt, *Tempel und Kulte syrischer Stadte in hellenistischromischer Zeit* (Leipzig, 1941), p. 58.
55. F. H. W. Gesenius, *Thesaurus philologicus linguae hebraeae et chaldeae Veteris Testamenti* (Leipzig, 1829), p. 264.
56. Michaelis, *Supplementa ad lexica hebraica,* p. 201; Rosenmüller*, Biblical Geography*, I. ii, p. 281, Wilson, *Lands of the Bible,* II, p. 384.
57. Herodotus*, Histories* II. 42; Diodorus Siculus 1.13.2.
58. G. Hoffman, “Aramäische Inschliften.*’’Zeitschrift für Assyriologie,* XI (1896), p. 246.
59. See the recent discussion by Jean-Pierre Adam, “À propos du trilithon de Baalbek, Le transport et la mise à l’oeuvre des mégalithes,” *Syria* LIV (1977), pp. 31-63.
60. O. von Richter, *Wallfahrt,* p. 88; quoted by Ritter, Die *Erdkunde,* XVII, p. 231.
61. S. Wolcott, “Notices of Jerusalem; and Excursion to Hebron and Sebeh or Masada; and Journey from Jerusalem northwards to Beirut, etc.” in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1843), p. 82; quoted by Ritter, *Die* *Erdkunde,* XVII, p. 232.
62. See von Schubert, *Reise in das Morgenland, op. cit..* Vol. III, p. 325.
63. *Chronographia* in *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* 11, p. 280.
64. Robinson, *Biblical Researches,* III, p. 509.
65. Robinson suggested that “Antonine rebuilt the great temple of the Sun: and erected the lesser temple to Jupiter Baal” *(Biblical Researches,* III, p. 520, n.6).
66. O. Puchstein in Th.Wiegand ed. *Palmyra* (Berlin, 1932).
67. B. Schulz in Wiegand ed., *Palmyra*
68. H. Winnefeld, B. Schulz, *Baalbek* (Berlin, Leipzig, 1921, 1923).
69. L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1928), VI, p. 375.
70. Winnefeld in *Wiegand,Baalbek, op. cit.,* Vol. II (1923), p. 110:
71. Rene Dussaud, “Jupiter heliopolitain,” *Syria* 1 (1920), pp. 3-15; Nina Jidejian, *Baalbek Heliopolis “City of the Sun”* (Beirut, 1975), ill. no. 135-140.
72. *Sat.* i. 23. 12.
73. Jeremiah 4:15.
74. Pesahim 117a; see Ginzberg, *Legends of the Sews,* VI, p. 375.
75. The readers of this passage probably understood it in the sense that Micah’s oracular image, after being removed from the temple of Dan, was placed in Baalbek. Baalbek being Dan, such an interpretation is superfluous.

**The “Great and Terrible Wilderness”**

In *Ages in Chaos* I brought together evidence from Hebrew and Egyptian sources which enabled me to establish the identity of the Hyksos with the Amalekites. I found that the time, the place, and the circumstances corresponded in both sources. In comparing the two sources and seeking to complement them, I looked also into the ancient Arabian traditions and found there plenty of material in support of my view. I lighted upon an old pre-Islamic story describing the wandering of the tribes under Moses, a story which until now has not been recognized as such. Yet the Arabian sources speak so clearly about these events that one wonders why no heed was paid to them before. For me they were not the starting point, but merely a welcome confirmation of what I was able to establish from a comparison of the Egyptian and Hebrew histories.

Outhman, son of Sadj, recites in his history that a torrent once penetrated the Ka’aba and overthrew the structure.[(1)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_1) This catastrophe did not influence the people of Mecca, and they persisted in their vicious ways. The signs of heavenly wrath inspired the king, Mondad, son of Amur (grandson of Mondad, the father-in-law of Ishmael) to address his people with these words:

Remember what happened to the Amalekites in the time of your fathers. They treated with scorn the Haram [the sacred dominion]; they did not respect what was sacred. The Lord expelled them from the holy place and dispersed them among the foreign countries.

You have seen how the Lord dealt with the Amalekites.

The narrator continued as follows:

The tradition reports that the Amalekites violated the privileges of the sacred territory and that the Almighty God sent against them ants of the smallest variety which forced them to desert Mecca.

Afterwards the Lord sent drought and famine and showed them the clouded sky at the horizon. They marched without rest toward those clouds which they saw near them, but were not able to reach them; they were pursued by the drought which was always at their heels.

The Lord led them to their native land, where He sent against them the *toufan*—a deluge.[(2)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_2)

Our interest is aroused by this last statement—that it was a deluge that took the tribe of the Amalekites by surprise when they reached their old native land.

Evidently the disturbance in the accustomed flow of events was experienced not only in Egypt, but in Arabia, too. Mecca, like Memphis, was visited by plagues: the shock that overthrew the cities of Egypt brought the Amalekites, at that time conquerors of Mecca, into disorder and tumult. They became like herds of animals brought to a state of excitement by an earthquake, and their fugacious troops reached Mount Seir (the Old Testament designates Mount Seir as their “native land” ) and arrived at the shores of the Red Sea as the Israelites were escaping from Egypt.

The catastrophe was obviously greater than a rupture of a dyke may cause. Not only the region of Seba, but Mecca, and all the shore of the sea—Tehama—were shattered. Could it be that Arim was not a “dyke” but something different? Massoudi wrote: “All persons versed in tradition among those peoples agree that the word ‘Arim’ designates a solidly built dam.” The meaning of the word “Arim” was not entirely certain if it required interpretation.

The same great catastrophe, when mountain-high waves rushed onto the land, became a theme of tradition and legends of many nations.

A Greek legend personified this upheaval in a battle of Zeus and Typhon, which took place over the sea, between Egypt and Syria. The origin of the legend and its historical background are clarified in *Worlds in Collision.* Strabo quoted Pindar: “It was father Zeus who once among the Arimi, by necessity, alone among the gods, smote monstrous Typhon of the fifty heads.” Strabo added: “But some understand the Syrians are Arimi.” This is the Greek legendary version of what happened at the Sea of Passage. The Arimi were Hebrews, who were called Arameans: Their origin was from Aram. Toufan of the Arabian author is the same as Typhon of the Greek author; Arim of the Arabian author is Arimi of the Greek author. he “flood of Arim” of the Arabian tradition was originally not the “rupture of the dyke” but the “flood of the Hebrews,” the flood which got their name because they found in it their salvation, whereas for other nations it meant destruction.

The Arab historian did not suspect any link between his story and the events of the Exodus, and he did not bring them into any connection; had he done so, it could be suspected that he was merely transmitting a passage of the Bible in an arbitrary form; but he seems unaware of the significance of his report.

**THE DELUGE OF MARIB is it Marib or Arim?**

A sudden inundation in which a whole country was destroyed, a land devastated, and in which a multitude of people perished is related in one of the earliest Arab pre-Islamic traditions.[(3)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_3) “The Flood of the Dyke” was an event which fixed itself indelibly in the memory of the Arabs. This flood was known also as the Deluge of Marib. Marib was the former capital of the Sabeans in Yemen, in the south of Arabia. Near this place a dam was constructed to gather the water which flowed in the wadi of Dhenne (or Adana) that divides the Balak hills. During the summer the bed of the wadi is often dry; in the winter, after rains, it often becomes so swollen as to be impossible to cross. An earthen dam, the remains of which, some 600 meters long, are still to be seen, was used for collecting and storing the water; in the rainless months an irrigation system supplied it to the gardens and to the pastures of the valley beneath.

Al-Masudi in his *Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*[(4)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_4) gives a description of what he supposed the dam of Marib to have been like before its destruction. In a dyke one parasang (ca. 2.2 kilometers) long were thirty openings which provided for the distribution of water throughout the land.

The rich fantasy of the oriental writers tells of a country in South Arabia whose beauty was proverbial far and wide. A whole month one could ride on his mule across this land (situated within the tropic of Cancer) without leaving the shade above his head. An empty basket on the head of the traveler would fill itself with fruits falling down from the trees.

The rupture of the dam turned this blessed country into ruin: the land was submerged, the structures were overthrown, the trees broken, the population drowned: the catastrophe ruined the entire kingdom.

The inhabitants of the Arabian desert preserved through centuries the memory of a remote past when the catastrophe of Marib occurred. A migration of tribes in South and North Arabia was connected with this cataclysm.

Different variants of this catastrophe were kept in the memory of generations, adorned with fancy and transmitted up to the time when Islamic writers recorded them in their histories. The catastrophe that transformed a fertile plain into a barren quarter is related in the Koran (sura 34):

Seba had in their dwellings a sign: two gardens on the right hand and on the left. Eat from the provision of your Lord, and give thanks to him! a good country and a forgiving Lord! but they turned away, and we sent against them the flood of the dyke; and we changed for them their two gardens into two gardens that grew bitter fruit and tamarisk and some few lote trees.

In other narratives referring to the flood of the Dyke, and in commentaries to the Koran, the devastation is said to have spread over all the inhabited land of South Arabia.

The story of the rupture of the dyke is one of the few recollections of ancient times in the Islamic tradition not compiled from the sacred books of the Hebrews, but received from native Arabian sources.

No one knows exactly when the dam of Marib was built. The oldest parts of the work were estimated to have been executed in the period of 1,000 to 700 B.C.E.,[(5)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_5) but most scholars consider this period to be too early. No one knows when it was destroyed: suppositions only were uttered.[(6)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_6) Neither is the cause of the destruction established with certainty. Possibly, the devastation by the water of the dam occurred more than once.[(7)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_7)

The quoted Al-Masudi, who in general was not disinclined to render here and there a fantastic tale, gives a naturalistic explanation for this catastrophe: “The waters undermined in an imperceptible way the foundations of the dam, and its strength was sapped little by little by time and the action of the waters.” [(8)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm#f_8)

Modern researchers also ascribe the destruction of the dyke to the action of wind and rain, which gradually disjoined the construction.[(9)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_9) Marib was neglected and the dam fell into disrepair.

If it is true that the dam was gradually and not suddenly destroyed and abandoned, and thus the service it rendered to the cultivation of the land ceased, how then did the many stories about the catastrophe come into existence? And if at some time a collapse really occurred, how could it be that it destroyed the whole country, even the high-lying fields and places far away? A quantity of water which a barrage of the wadi Dhenne could assemble would, at a bursting of the construction, cause a local calamity, but not a “deluge” of South Arabia. And if really only a few gardens were destroyed, how could it be that “there is hardly any historical event of pre-Islamic history that has become embellished with so much that is fanciful and related in so many different versions” [(10)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm#f_10) as the bursting of the dam?

Were a great catastrophe that remained in the memory of the Arabs to occur at a time when Hebrew, Hellenistic, Roman and Christian historians were writing their annals, could it possibly have escaped their attention? And why does the old tradition place the catastrophe in the third or fourth generation after Ishmael, son of Abraham? Why do the old Arabian traditions connect that time with a general migration of tribes and especially with the migration of the Amalekites in the direction of Egypt and Canaan?

Could it be that the legend does not relate to the Sabean irrigation system, but to some tremendous upheaval, when not a reservoir of rain-water, but the depths of a sea threw their volume across a dam in a plain whose ground disappeared in a rupture of geological strata?

The catastrophe was obviously greater than a rupture of a dyke (Arim) may cause. Not only the region of Seba, but Mecca, and all the sea shore-Tehama, were shattered.

May be Arim signifies not a “dyke,” but something different?

Masoudi: All Persons versed in tradition among those peoples agree that the word Arim designates a solidly built dam.

The meaning of the word Arim was not entirely sure: it required interpretation.

\* \* \*

The same great catastrophe, when mountain high waves rushed on land, became a theme of tradition and legends of many nations.

A Greek legend personified this upheaval in a battle of Zeus and Typhon. The origin of the legends and its historical background are put into light on a page of *Worlds in Collision.*

Strabo quoted Pindar: “It was father Zeus who once among the Arimi, by necessity, alone of the gods, smote monstrous Typhon of the fifty heads.” Strabo added “But some understand that the Syrians are Arimi.” This is the Greek legendary version of what happened at the Red Sea. The reader must look for argument in above-mentioned work of the author.

Arimi were the Hebrews, who were called Arameans: their origin was from Aram.

Toufan of the Arabian authors is the same as the Typhon of the Greeks.

**MARIB**

What does the designation Marib mean? “Various attempts to explain the etymology of Marib are not satisfactory.” [(11)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm#f_11) Marib was identified with Saba by the Arab geographers.[(12)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_12) It was supposed to be the name of a castle occupied by the rulers of Saba.[(13)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_13)

Does the name Marib occur in the Scriptures of the Hebrews? In the stony valley of Rephidim near Horeb, the Israelites met the Amalekites, more exactly at a point called Massa and Meriba (Exodus 17:7-8): “And he called the name of the place Massa and Meriba. Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Rephidim.” This was shortly after the Israelites had passed to the eastern shore of the Sea of Passage escaping from their persecutors.

The Amalekites, we are told by th Arab historians, when escaping from the plagues of Mecca, arrived at their native site at a time when a sudden flood overran the land; many of them perished. Their native land, according to the Old Testament, was Mount Seir, which stretches along the gulf of Aqaba and the Red Sea.

It becomes conceivable that the flood overtook a part of them near the place where the Egyptian host drowned, and where the Hebrews escaped the depths. According to al-Masudi, “the waters covered the lands . . . ruined the habitations, and let perish all the troops.” The Amalekites migrated, ready for attack and battle. Why should an inundation of the Sabean gardens by the waters of the reservoir destroy all the troops?

All the troops did not perish. It is not recorded in the Scriptures that the Sea of Passage swallowed a part of the Amalekites, but the catastrophe surely was not restricted only to the place where the Israelites were: the shores of Aqaba and the slopes of Mount Seir were surely involved, and besides the Egyptians there must have been other victims.

Arabian sources also retained a recollection of some tribes that succeeded in escaping the catastrophe, being saved in a miraculous way. We are to become attentive. The story we shall hear is in no way attributed by the Arabian tellers of legends to the history of the Israelites escaping from Egypt, or to their leader. The Koran and Arabian literature generally are full of stories related to Moses (Nabi Musa), but all of them are obviously culled from Biblical or Aggadic tradition. Therefore a narration which is related by the Arab historians to the time and place of the bursting of the dyke in Merib in the Sabean realm is of value exactly because of the absence of any signs of its having been borrowed from Hebrew sources.

In the region of Marib (Meriba) was staying a tribe that had arrived there only a short time before. According to al-Masudi,

The king [in other sources the ruler of the tribe] was Amr the son of Amir; he had the surname Mozaikiya. He had a divine brother whose name was Amran. The ruler had for wife a woman skilful in the art of divination; her name was Zarifah.[(14)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_14)

This family of three persons stood at the head of the nation: two men and one woman—a ruler, his divine brother, and his wife, the prophetess. Similarly, a family of three led the Israelites according to their tradition: a ruler, his divine brother, and a sister, the prophetess. The leaders of the Israelites were sons of Amram. The leaders of the tribe rescued at Marib were sons of Amir. The divine brother of Moses was Aharon; the divine brother of the ruler of the nomads at Marib was Amran. The sister of Moses was Miriam, his wife was Zipora; the prophetess at Marib was Zeripha. If the second and the third syllables are reversed the names become identical.

The peculiar name Mozaikiya, the surname of Amr, son of Amir, was an object of surmise for Arab philologists from early times. A word which sounds similar in Arabic is *mazak,* “a piece,” and folk etymology construed a forced story: the ruler was called by this surname because he was accustomed, when going to his nightly rest, to tear to pieces the garment he wore during the day.

It seems to me that the name is not an Arabic one, but rather is of Egyptian design. Mose-ika-ya could be a name arranged similarly to Smenkh-ka-re, the last syllable being the name of a divinity—god Re (or Ra) in the case of Smenkare; in the case of Mosaikaya—the God Ya (as in the names Isa *iah* , Jerem *iah,* and the like), the syllable *ka* being the Egyptian word for “soul.” If this archaic Arabian tradition brought down to us the name of the leader correctly, we may at last have the Semitic name of the great deliverer, and also his Egyptian name. The name “the soul of Yahweh” would surely be a fitting name for the man who, according to the Scriptures, was the first to whom the Divine name was revealed.

In the Arabian story the rupture of the dam and the catastrophe were foreseen by the prophetess Zerifa. As told by al-Masudi, she had a dream:

A great cloud covered the earth and ejected lightnings and flashes. Then the thundercloud burst, and thunderbolt fell and consumed everything in its path; reaching the ground it reduced to ashes all it touched in its fall. “After this,” said the prophetess, “it will happen that everything will submerge.”

On the eve of the day when the sea burst, a dreadful cloud—not in a dreamy vision, but in the sight of a multitude—darkened the heavens, and flashes of lightning intersected the darkness. “And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness, but it gave light by night.” (Exodus 14:20) The Aggada adds that “the Lord discharged hailstones and coals of fire.”

The spirit that inspired the prophetess Zaripha rescued the people. She predicted “a calamity of calamities, a momentous thing, a misfortune without precedent.” A tempest would ruin the entire country.

It was the prophetic woman in the camp of the Israelites whose exaltation is especially mentioned when on the shore of the Sea of Passage, and this time she is called “the prophetess” (Exodus 15:20-21):

And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon, took a timbrel in her hand and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

And Miriam answered them, “Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and the rider hath he thrown into the sea.”

The Arab authors have embellished the story with the inevitable oriental addenda of palmy days in a paradise garden and of a suzerain enchanted by houries, but these are characteristic elaborations on the part of the tale tellers and do not belong the story of the dyke broken at the sea, nor to the description of a spoiled irrigation system.

Not only the prophetess Zeripha, but also her husband and his brother had prophetic dreams. According to one source it was the “divine brother Amran who was the first to receive the revelation concerning the impending catastrophe.” This brother was gifted with magical knowledge of the right way. Thus forewarned, Mozaikiya disposed of all his possessions and emigrated with all his people (Nuwairi).

It was Aharon in the camp of the Israelites who with the help of the Urim and the Tumim oracle determined the way to go and the deed to undertake.

In the Arabian tradition, in the variants I had before me, there was no allusion to a persecuting host and no knowledge of the way the tribes passed before they reached Marib.

The Arabian philologists did not succeed in explaining the origin of the name Marib. In the books of Exodus and Numbers two similar events are recounted which occurred in two places called Meriba: in both instances the tribes complained about the absence of water; the first time at the beginning of their march through the wilderness; the second time in the last years of the wandering. The etymology of the name is explained to be “the water of discord.”

Wells in an arid region were almost always waters of dispute. That the Israelite tribes many times suffered thirst in the desert is recorded in short but dramatic sentences. In the violent changes in the different strata of that region water sources disappeared; they were blocked and diverted; thermal springs appeared, such as the spring Mara. An inspired dowser might be able to find hidden water sources in the blocks of split-apart rocks by striking one with a rod.

It even seems to me possible that the Sabean region of Arabia was before the catastrophe “a garden across which the traveller could voyage a month on his mule without leaving the shade,” similar to India, rich in water and on the same degree of latitude, where the vehement sun lets the soil sprout abundant vegetation. The southern and northern fringes of Arabia attained a high level of culture at a very early time, which would hardly be possible if these parts of Arabia had been as poor in water as they are today.

It was not the rupture of the dyke that caused the dwindling of the fortunes of the country, but drought and the disappearance of water sources, of which records are preserved both in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Arab annals.

The construction of the dyke in the Sabean region could have been a remedial measure to keep alive the gardens in this plain, ten days’ march from the Red Sea and from the Gulf of Aden alike. The disasters—with a field of destruction that embraced not only the other plains of Arabia but also far-removed lands—were remembered as “the deluge of Marib,” and as a sudden torrent that overthrew the sanctuary at Mecca, and as a time of drought and famine and also of plagues, and as a time when whole countries were destroyed, left desolate and abandoned, while armies perished, and tribes migrated. But with the passing of centuries the real place and cause were forgotten and a deserted dyke in the south of Arabia was supposed to have been the main theater of events. Its ruined remnants were supposed to be coeval witnesses of days recollected as days of terror, when land and sea were shaken in spasms. Possibly this place had been called Marib since ancient times—what place of water is not a place of strife? Likewise the oil wells of today, being rare, are wells of strife. Or perhaps the deluge of Meriba at the sea was only later connected connected with the visible remains of the abandoned dam, the name Marib being given to it subsequently.

The drought, followed by famine and by different plagues, compelled the Amalekites to leave their ancestral home in Mecca and to migrate toward the clouds far away in the sky and “toward their native land,” where they, or a part of them, were drowned in the flood, according to *Kitab-alaghaniy.*

And then—we return to the scriptural narration—they met the migrants coming from Egypt. The latter advanced, following the mist that covered the desert in these latter days of in-the-beginning; it was like the vapor which arose from the darkness “upon the face of the deep.”

In the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents. Whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. And the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran. (Numbers 9:17, 21; 10:12)

The clouds are repeatedly mentioned in the history of the wandering. According to the *Kitab-alaghaniy,* “the Amalekites journeyed in the direction of the cloud.”

If these were the same clouds which were followed by the Israelites, the two groups must have encountered each other. And this encounter in fact took place by Rephidim. (Exodus 17:8)

Jewish tradition retained a memory of the encounter in the mist: “Joshua did not at first want to expose himself to danger and leave the protection of the cloud . . . then he set forth against Amalek.” [(15)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm#f_15)

The author of *Kitab-alaghaniy* did not know what befel the Amalekites after they left, following the cloud. He supposed that they found their end in a sudden flood.

At Rephidim the Israelites took up arms against the vanguard of the roaming Amalekites. When, after a prolonged sojourn at Mount Horeb, they attempted to reach Canaan from the south, the scouts they had sent out brought them the ill tidings that the Amalekites already occupied the south of Canaan (Numbers 13:29). It was a hard blow to the Israelites and their hearts grew faint. They made a desperate and unsuccessful attempt to reach the land from the south, daring to attack the Amalekites: “For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword.” (Numbers 14:23). They were discomfitted and driven to Horma. They proceeded on their thorny way in the land of flint, in the untrodden desert, in the labyrinthine sandy ravines, upon old basalt and limestone. As a Jewish legend relates, “When they saw the vast, extensive, utterly barren wilderness before them, their courage gave way.” After the highest pitch of expectation their hopes were revealed as vain. “He tortures us with famine,” they complained.

“With the name of a new settlement he has deceived this great multitude; after he had succeeded in leading us from a well-known to an uninhabited land, he now plans to send us to the underworld, the last road of life.” [(16)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm#f_16)

We are at the crossing point in the desert where the Israelites coming from Egypt met the Amalekites coming from Mecca. We followed the Scripture describing the way of the Israelites and the old Arabian traditions describing the way of the Amalekites. From this point on we shall follow the Isrealites’ wandering in the desert, according to the Biblical and Arabian traditions.

**MIDIAN**

Mount Seir extends along the length of the Red Sea and includes the area known as Hedjaz. The mountainous chain of volcanic formations stretches along the western border of the plateau called the Arabian Desert, and constitutes a barrier opposite the depression which composes the bed of the Red Sea. When it is said that the tribes of Israel “turned and took our journey into the wilderness by way of the Red Sea [Yam Suf]” or that they “compassed Mount Seir many days” (Deuteronomy 2:1) it means just what is said, that they went southward along the mountainous chain not far from the shore of the Red Sea in the region of Hedjaz. It is difficult to understand why the historians and Bible exegetes agreed that the decades of wandering of the tribes were confined to a very small area which may be crossed in one week or two.

Arabia is wide; nomads with cattle, looking for water and pasture, drive great distances. Defeated by the hostile Amalekites in the south of Canaan, the fugitives from Egypt had no other choice but to return to Egypt or to move by way of the Red Sea.

Midian was the land where, according to the Scripture, Moses had spent his manhood when a fugitive from Egyptian justice; there he also became the son-in-law of a priest named Jethro. (Exodus 2:15-21) The habitation of the Midianite priest was to the south or to the east of Mount Horeb. (Exodus 3:1) Midian was not in the Negev or on the coast of the Aqaba Gulf: in order to escape Egyptian justice Moses needed to go farther than the Sinai peninsula.

The abode of the Midianites is to be looked for near the place where the city of Medina is today. This name Medina may likely be a remnant of the habitation of the Midianites there. The identification of Midian and Medina may be further substantiated by the name of the Midianite priest, Jethro. The old Arabian name of Medina is Yathrib.

But even here the Israelites did not pause, but continued on their way south. They were strangers in this land and they begged the Midianites to give them a guide for the way through the desert. “We went through all that great and terrible wilderness,” they said at the end of the way.

Would the so-called Sinai Peninsula be called “that great and terrible wilderness” in face of the Arabian desert, fifty times as great? Did the Israelite tribes really tramp one decade after another in the narrow and short strip that runs from the south shore of the Dead Sea to the Aqaba Gulf? The desert of the forty-year wandering was not the Sinai Peninsula, but a much larger area. The inclination of the historians is generally to deny the ancients long itineraries. Midian being the Medina of Moslem times, actually deep in the Arabian Peninsula, all indications in the Old Testament are for a deep penetration of the Arabian Peninsula by the wandering Israelites who escaped the land of Egypt, destroyed by the catastrophe in the mid-fifteenth century before the present era.

A wandering of nomads with their animals in years of drought would encompass large areas. Overcome by the Amalekites of southern Canaan and driven to the Red Sea, they would scarcely remain in the same region. Their path led them to the south.

**MECCA**

Ka’aba, the holy spot in Mecca, was a sanctuary long before the time of Mohammed. The Ka’aba has the form of a cube or chamber, and the name is interpreted as meaning “a cube.” In the immediate vicinity of this small structure—inside the walls that encircle an open-to-the-sky court—a spring enclosed in a deep well provides the faithful with health-restoring water; once it was a well of oracular decision and it is certain that the spring was held in reverence at a very early period and that the fount determined the building of the sanctuary and the foundation of the city. It is called the well of Zam-Zam.

Zam-Zam is explained to mean in Arabic “to drink with small gulps,” or also “water in abundance.” But it may be a reminiscence of the former prehistoric dwellers in Arabia. Concerning the eastern boundaries of the land of Ammon, lost in the sand of the desert, which the tribes approached at the end of their wandering, it is said (Deut. 2:20): “Giants dwelt therein in old time; and the Ammonites call them Zam-Zum(im).”

The Israelite tribes apparently visited the plains and hills where the generation of the Zamzum lived and died away in a gray antiquity. Most probably the Israelite tribes, roaming about in a thirsty land with their little ones and with their flocks, were attracted to every well yielding drink.

Let us proceed with the annals of *Kitab-alaghaniy,* which I cited up to the point when the Amalekites, driven out of Mecca by ants and drought and famine, migrated and moved toward the clouds on the horizon and came to their native land of Marib, where a flood overcame them. When they left Mecca a tribe called the Djorhomites entered the place and took care of the sanctuary neglected by the Amalekites. But they also were mindless of the holy duties imposed on them and, as they did not listen to the admonitions of their king, they were visited by warning signs; a sudden torrent of rainy flood ruined the Ka’aba. A number of years passed and the Amalekites were not heard of. The *Kitab-alaghaniy* continues:

Meanwhile arrived the tribes, brought in a disorderly retreat by the rupture of the dam of Marib; with them was the prophetess Tarickah [Zaripha] who had announced to them the disaster, and at their head Mozaikiya, the same as Amr, son of Amir, son of Thalabah. . . . On reaching the gates of Mecca, the tribes stopped, and Amr [Mozaikiya] their leader, sent to the inhabitants his son Thalabah, who spoke to them in the name of the emigrant tribes: “Departed from our native land and going in search of another, we have not found a land the inhabitants of which will agree to restrict themselves a little as to let us have a place and to grant us hospitality until our explorers will return; for we have sent on errand some of our men to explore a territory proper for our establishing ourselves on it.

“Will you cede to us a small space of your lands and allow us to remain there for a while to rest until we shall learn from our scouts whether we must go to the north or to the east? As soon as we shall learn on what site we have more chances for relief, we shall direct ourselves without delay from this place. We do hope that our sojourn with you will be very short.”

The tribe of Djorhom refused:

“No, in God’s name, we shall not put ourselves aside, we and our cattle, for having the pleasure of receiving you. Go along wherever you like to go; we have nothing to do with you.”

Mozaikiya, informed of this answer, sent them a second message worded thus:

“It is absolutely necessary that I spend at your place a whole year awaiting the answer of the messengers that I sent to explore the north and the east. If you let me take hold here and if you will receive me with good will, I will be in accord with you and we shall divide the use of the pastures and of the water; but if you will refuse this adjustment, I will establish myself with you despite you. And then, when you will send your herds to graze on the grassland, you will find only what remains after our animals; and if you will like to drink at the well it will be measured for you by a vessel. If you will attempt to repel me by force, I will battle against you, and if I shall be the victor, I shall take your wives and kill your men; and these that may escape I shall forbid the approach to the sacred territory.”

These passages resemble another passage, in Numbers 20:14f. There is a similarity of situation, but not identity of events.

And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, “Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us . . . we have dwelt in Egypt a long time. The Lord . . . brought us forth out of Egypt: and behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border. Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king’s high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders.”

And Edom said unto him, “Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword.”

And the children of Israel said unto him, “We will go by the high way: and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it . . .”

And he said, “Thou shalt not go through.” And Edom came out against him with much people and with a strong hand.

Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border.

The Hebrew record cites similar approaches to Moab and Ammon, also refused.

Of these two accounts, the Hebrew record relates to an episode near the end of the wandering of the tribes in the desert; the Arabian record relates to a moment during the wandering of some tribes and before the land of settlement was was explored by men sent on this errand. In one case the negotiation is about a temporary stay, and in the other case about passage. And still the correspondences are conspicuous, as they repeat the plight of the Israelites in the desert and their way of dealing with the tribes through whose land they had to pass.

Upon a cursory reading of the Arabian recollections it seems as if the tribes were looking for land for themselves towards the north or the east. It is true that mention is made of some men of the tribes sent to the north and east to look for a temporary settlement; but it is also recounted about another land of which an explorers’ report is awaited.

The spies were sent from the desert of Pharan (Numbers 13:3). The desert of Pharan according to the old Arabian sources, neglected by Biblical research, is in the mountainous area of Hedjaz.[(17)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_17) The spies returned to Pharan into Kadesh and brought their report (Numbers 13:26).

The name Kadesh was given to many different places. Jerusalem was called Kadesh, as was Carchemish on the Orontes; there was a Kadesh in Galilee, Kadesh Naphtali, mentioned a few times in the Scriptures. The word means “sanctuary” and every venerated place was called Kadesh.

Difficulties were laid before the exegetes concerning the locality called Kadesh, a station on the wandering of the Israelites. Kadesh was at the beginning of the march, Kadesh was at its end: “And the space in which we came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years.” (Deut. 2:14). Accordingly it was surmised that for 38 out of the 40 years of the wandering the tribes were settled in Kadesh. The reason for the long stay of the Israelites at Kadesh-barnea was in the existence there of sources of water, while in the desert most of the rare sources became bitter. At Mecca there are sources of water, considered sacred and many legends are preserved about them. These water springs, not destroyed in the catastrophe, were the main incentive for the Israelites to congregate there.

May it be that these were two different holy spots, both called Kadesh? In one place in the Bible Kadesh is said to be situated in the wilderness of Pharan, and another time in the wilderness of Zin. Sometimes Kadesh is called by a fuller name, Kadesh-barnea. This designation is not consistently applied.

The place in the desert is called in the Scriptures “a city” ( ). This caused surprise. Usually the place is looked for in the northern part of the Sinai desert, and since Kadesh-barnea has been located in , about 18 miles south of el-Arish on the Mediterranean coast. This place never played any important role in the subsequent history of the nation. If this or another place located inside the borders of the future Jewish Kingdom had been the scene of many events during the wandering in the desert, would it not have been venerated in later centuries? The place where the tabernacle stood, where the judgment court was established, where Miriam died and was buried, should have been marked if only by the slightest sign of national veneration, if at any time in history it was at the borders of Jewish land. But it was never in its boundaries.

In 1964, more than a score of years after I came to this conclusion, Bar Droma, the author of *Negeb,* independently brought arguments to show that Kadesh-barnea was Medain-Salib, formerly El-Hejr, about 450 km southeast of Petra.[(18)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_18) As explained above, I identify Kadesh-barnea with Mecca.

The Hebrews wandered in the great desert, and not in the small one. Their way from Horma was at first southeastward. Correspondingly their camps moved: the eastern camp was the first, followed by the southern camp, and then the other two ( ). The southern camp was called “one that is turned to Yemen.” This description appears more proper for a camp which is in the Arabian peninsula rather than the Sinaitic triangle.

In the Arabian record we read that the tribes under Mozaikiya succeeded to enter Mecca and occupy it. The Djorhomites sent an army against Mozaikiya. The ensuing battle lasted for three days; both sides were courageous. It ended with the Djorhomites being put to a disorderly retreat, only a few of them escaping death.

Another author, al-Masudi, wrote that the Djorhomites had been expelled earlier by the children of Ismael:

The Lord sent against the Djorhomites swift clouds, ants, and other signs of his rage, and many of them perished. The children of Ismael, when grown in number, expelled the Djorhomites from Mecca. These established themselves near the land of Djohainah, where an sudden torrent drowned all of them in a single night. The theater of this catastrophe is known under the name Idam (Fury). Omeyah of the tribe Takif made an allusion to this event in a the following verse: “In the time of yore the Djorhomites took the ground at Tehamah and a furious current swept all of them away.” [(19)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm#f_19)

That an earthquake was the cause of the havoc is to be inferred from the already quoted passage of Masudi:

From el-Hadjoun up to Safa[(20)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/desert.htm" \l "f_20) all became desert; in Mecca the nights are silent, no voice of pleasant talks. We dwelt there, but in a most resounding night and in the most terrible of devastations we were destroyed.

Loud sounds often accompany an earthquake. Din and roaring became linguistic substitutes for the phenomenon itself. Mecca was abandoned by the Amalekites when, shortly before its occupation by the Israelites, it was shattered by earthquakes. This was the same catastrophe that ruined the Middle Kingdom of Egypt. The Amalekites moved toward Palestine and Egypt, and soon built their fortress-capital Avaris at el-Arish. The Israelites, who were unable to break through to Palestine from the south, reached the former capital of the Amalekites.

After occupying Mecca the conquerors allowed the Ismaelite tribes, which had not participated in the battle against them, to visit the sanctuary.

**THE PROMISED LAND**

The tribes under Mozaikiya did not remain in Mecca. According to Masudi, after a number of years

They continued on their way and came to camp between the land of the Aharites and Akk, near a pool named Gassan, between two valleys called Zebid and Rima, and they drank the water of the pool.

In the book of Deuteronomy it is said (2:1,3): “We compassed Mount Seir many days . . . And the Lord spake . . . turn you northward.” They reached the border of Edom and Moab (Deuteronomy 2:10-13):

The Emim dwelt therein in times past . . . which also were accounted giants, as the Anakim; but the Moabites call them Emim. The Horim also dwelt in Seir before time; but the children of Esau succeeded them . . . And we went over the brook Zerid.

According to the book of Numbers (21:12-17):

From thence they removed [i.e., from the wilderness which is before Moab, toward the sunrising], and pitched in the valley of Zared. From thence they removed and pitched on the other side of Arnon . . . and at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab. And from thence to Beer [pool]: that is, the well whereof the Lord spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water. Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it . . .

Then follows the song rewritten by the redactor of Numbers from “The book of the wars of the Lord” (Numbers 21:14). The pool where the migrants camped and drank and exalted themselves in praise seems to be the same pool as that mentioned by Masudi. The Aharites and the Horites are quite surely the same. Akk would stand for Anak. The valley of Zebid accordingly would be named in the Hebrew sources the valley of Zered.

Let me finish the story of al-Masudi:

They halted in that land and established their domicile in the plain, on the heights, and at all the neighboring places. This mountainous area borders upon Syria, and divides it from Hedjaz, keeping close to the territory of Damascus, the province of Jordan and Palestine, and comes to an end at the mountain of Moses. The place designated here is that part of the Promised Land that was conquered in the days of Moses, according to the Scriptures.

The author of the tenth century of our era, bringing down the record he received in his time from old sources, did not suspect any affinity of this story with the story of Moses. Therefore he designated the Mount of Moses as the border in the conquest of the tribes under Mozaikiya, tribes which escaped from a deluge and came into the depth of the great desert, and departed from there into the land between Damascus and Mount Nebo.

The Arabian tradition tells that some parts of these tribes when in the desert departed from the main stock. A similar story is preserved in the Aggada. Until recently Hebrew sects were living in the desert among the Arabs.

Is the old Arabian tradition, handed down by the Islamic historians, an authentic story of the wandering of Israel in the desert? The material is dealt with quite differently in this pre-Islamic tradition from the way the Biblical legends are repeated in the Koran. So possibly, Moses and his tribes enjoy a double existence in the Arabic tradition.

One of these two stories knows but the segment of time from the flood at Marib up to the conquest of Transjordania. In both traditions the events are ascribed to a time separated from the epoch of the patriarchs by a few generations. In both accounts destructions occurred, plagues came in abundance, water sources vanished, and an earthquake destroyed human dwellings at night. Both ages were times of the migrations of tribes. In both accounts, due to famine and drought, the migrants followed clouds through the desert. A sudden flood—in which many troops perished, having been brought to migration by former plagues—happened in both sequences of events. The places of the last occurrence were at Idam, at Tehama in one account, and at Edom and Pi-Tehom in the other. In both cases some tribes escaped with their lives from the flood. These tribes were under the leadership of a ruler, his divine brother and sister (or a wife), all of them prophetically gifted. Their names and the name of their father are not dissimilar in the two accounts. They migrated with their treasuries and cattle; they sent spies to explore a land for their settlement; in peculiar espressions they asked local rulers permission for a temporary stay; they were ready to do battle in case they were refused; they had a temporary abode in some venerated places. They did not remain there but after a stay for a year or more departed. According to the Arabian story they marched through the land of the Ahorites and Akk and “came to a well” situtated “between two valleys” and “drank water of it.” The same information is given in the Hebrew story, except that the places are called “land of the Horites” and “Anak.” They conquered the land of the Jordan from Damascus to mount Nebo.

Are these two different renderings about different tribes that had similar experiences? Or two different stories of the same tribes and the same events?

Both took place at the time when the Amalekites (called by name in both accounts) left their paternal home and came to roam about. And, from what is said in the Scriptures about the desert (“all that great and terrible wilderness” ); and from the description of the way (along the Red Sea, around Mount Seir) and of the plain of their encampment; and because of the political stimuli to depart from the place of defeat; and because of the necessity of going though vast spaces away from the arid quarters—it may be concluded: the desert of wandering was the immense plateau of Arabia.

The pre-Islamic traditions of the wandering of the Tribes in the Wilderness, having been written down much later than the Hebrew text, cannot claim to be the better or more correct version; but they may cast light on many issues.

References

1. Cited in Abu’l Faradj, *Kitab-Alaghaniy (Book of Songs), transl. by F. Fresnel, in* *Journal Asiatique,* 3rd series, Vol. VI (1838), p. 204.
2. The Arab author remarked that the word *toufan* ordinarily means “deluge,” but he ascribes to it the sense of “death.” Evidently we have to reject his effort to change the meaning of the word. Fresnel changed the meaning of the word *ghayth* which, as he wrote, signifies primarily “rain” or “clouds,” into “pasture” ; he remarks himself that a mirage could not deceive a dweller of Arabia. The original meaning of *ghayth,* i.e., “clouds,” must be retained.
3. See for instance the traditions collected by D. Reiske, *De Arabum Epocha Vetustissima, Sail Ol Arem, etc.* (Leipzig, 1748).
4. *Murudij el-Dhabab (Les Prairies d’or)* (Paris, 1861-77), Vol. III, 366 ff. Masudi, historian and geographer, was born at Baghdad; he voyaged extensively during his life, visiting Ceylon and Madagascar. He lived in Egypt, where he died ca. 956.
5. E. Glaser ed., *Reise nach Marib* ( ), p. 68.
6. Hamza al-Ispaham estimated the time of the destruction at about 400 years before Islam, and Ibn Khaldun gave a less remote date of about 250 years before Islam; Yakut referred it to the period of Abyssinian rule, i.e., 542-570 A.D. Gosselini put the date at 374 B.C.E., Reiske 30-40 B.C.E., Shulters 30-40 A.D.—see *The Encyclopaedia of Islam.*
7. Al-Masudi and Ibn Rosta speak of a first and a second devastation.
8. Al-Masudi, *Murudij al-Dhabab,* III, 370.
9. E. Glaser ed., “Zwei Inschriften ueber den Dammbruch von Marib,” p. 13f.
11. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* s.v. “Marib.”
12. Cf. references collected by E. M. Jomard in F. Mengin, *Histoire sommaire de l’Egypte,* (Paris, 1839), pp. 341-44.
13. “According to other traditions, Marib was the name of a castle that belonged to these kings in a remote age” —Al-Masudi, *Murudij al-Dhabab,* p. 374.
14. Masudi, *Murudij al-Dhabab,* Vol. III, pp. 374f. Cf. Nuwairi, Chap. IV. *Kitab-alaghaniy* called the prophetess of the tribe Tarikah and did not mention her relationship to the leader.
15. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1911), p. 59.
16. Ginzberg, *Legends,* III. 41-42. Cf. Philo, *Moses* I. 35; Josephus *The Antiquities of the Jews* III, 1. 3-5.
18. *Palestine Exploration Quarterly,* July-December 1964. [In Deuteronomy (1:2) it is said that the distance between Mount Horeb and Kadesh-barnea, by way of Mount Seir, is eleven days. In antiquity a day of march was a unit of distance very close to 40 km. This would mean that Kadesh-barnea was not more than about 440 km from Mount Horeb. Assuming Mount Horeb to be located somewhere in the Sinai peninsula, the distance from there to Mecca is between 800 and 900 km. Possibly the biblical figure of eleven days of march should be understood as *days and nights* of march, in which case the distance would be ca. 880 km.]
19. Masudi, *Murudij al-Dhabab* III, chap. XXXIX. Tehamah is the stretch of land along the Arabian coast of the Red Sea. The Aggada calls Pi ha-Khiroth by the name Pi-Tehom. The first means “abyss” ; the second “entrance to the abyss.” Idam may recall Edom on the borders of which the catastrophe of the Sea of Passage took place.
20. Safa may recall the name Yam Suf (Sea of the Torrent). Also in this version we read about clouds, various plagues, and a sudden flood.

**Beyond the Mountains of Darkness**

This short discourse is not a part of the chronological problem discussed in the work of reconstruction of ancient history; it deals with historical geography—the whereabouts of the places of exile of the Ten Tribes of Israel.

The sentence (II Kings 17:6) which relates how the King of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away into Assyria and “placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes,” caused much deliberation among the historians. The mystery of the Ten Lost Tribes produced also fantastic convictions such as the belief that the Britons are the descendants of the Lost Tribes who, after much wandering, reached Albion.

The sentence in II Kings 17:6 is repeated almost verbatim in 18:11. In I Chronicles 5:26, the exile of the Transjordan tribes—Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe Manasseh—to Halah, and Habor and Hara, and to the river Gozan is ascribed to “Pul king of Assyria” and to “Tilgath-pileser king of Assyria.” Modern scholars consider Pul and Tiglath-pileser to be one and the same king, Pul having been his name in Babylonia.[(1)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm#f_1)

It is generally agreed that the location of Halah (in Hebrew with two letters *kheth,* transcribed as h in scholarly texts), or Khalakh, is not given to identification.[(2)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm#f_2) As to Gozan, the texts of II Kings 17:6 and 18:11 speak of Habor by the river Gozan; also I Chronicles 5:26 speaks of the river Gozan. In Isaiah 37:12 it can be understood as a region or a people of a region. The correct translation of the two passages in the Second Book of Kings is “to the confluence *(habor)*[(3)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm" \l "f_3) of the river Gozan.”

Biblical scholars who sought for the place of exile of, first, the two and a half tribes of Israel by Tiglath-Pileser and then of all the tribes of Israel by Sargon upon the fall of Samaria, decided that the river’s name was Habor and Gozan was the region. They have therefore identified Gozan with Guzana, modern Tell Halaf in northeastern Syria. But this interpretation is a violation of the texts. Looking for a river Habor, they thought to identify it with the tributary of the river Euphrates mentioned in Ezekiel I:3 “the word of the Lord came . . . unto Ezekiel . . . in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar.” However the spellings in Hebrew of Habor and Chebar are different, the river Khvor (Chebar) is not Habor, and the latter is not a river at all. Furthermore, the co-called river Chebar is actually an irrigation canal.[(4)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm#f_4)

In explaining why the misfotune of exile befell the population of the Northern Kingdom, the Book of Kings says that the Children of Israel “worshipped all the host of heaven and served Baal,” and “caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments,” and therefore “the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only” (II Kings 17:17, 18).

“Removed them out of his sight” seems to signify that the people of Israel were removed far away, out of every contact with the remnant Judah, not even by a chance messenger.

When one hundred and thirty-eight years later, in the beginning of the sixth century, the people of Judah were also led into exile—by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—they did not find the exiled tribes of Israel in Babylonia, though they dwelt by the river Chebar (Khvor, i.e., Khabur), which flows in the central region of that country.

It appears that the places to which the Ten Tribes were removed by the Assyrian kings must have been far more remote than northeastern Syria.

Assyria, with its capital cities of Nimrud (Calah), Dur Sharrukin (Khorsabad), and Nineveh—all on the Tigris—expanded greatly in the days of its warrior kings Tiglath-Pileser, Sargon, and Sennacherib. Repeatedly, the Assyrian kings led their troops across the Caucasus northward. Not satisfied with the passage along the coastal road of the Caspian Sea, they also explored the mountainous passes. Sargon, the conqueror of Samaria, wrote in his annals:

I opened up mighty mountains, whose passes were difficult and countless, and I spied out their trails.

Over inaccessible paths in steep and terrifying places I crossed . . .[(5)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm" \l "f_5)

The descriptions of Tiglath-pileser and Sargon of their campaigns in the north lead us to recognize that they passed the mountains of the Caucasus and reached the steppes between the Don and the Volga. When the barrier of the mountains was overcome, they could proceed northward in a scarcely populated area barren of natural defenses, where they would have met less resistance than in the foothills of the mountains. It is unknown how far they may have let their armies of conquest march across the steppes, but probably they did not give the order to return homeward until the army brought its insignia to some really remote point: it could be as far as the place of the confluence of the Kama with the Volga, or even of the Oka, still farther north. The middle flow of the Volga would be the furthermost region of the Assyrian realm.

The roads to the Russian steppes along the Caspian and Black seas were much more readily passable than the narrow path along the river Terek and the Daryal Canyon that cut the Caucasus and wind at the foot of Mount Kazbek, over sixteen thousand feet high.

The fact that the “confluence of the river Gozan” is considered a sufficient designation suggests that it must have been a great stream.

A large river in the plain behind the crest of the Caucasus is the Don, and a still larger river—the largest in Europe—is the Volga. If the Assyrians did not make a halt on the plain that stretches immediately behind the Caucasus and moved along the great rivers without crossing them to conquer the great plain that lies open behind the narrow span where the rivers Don and Volga converge—then the most probable place of exile might be reckoned to be at the middle Volga. The distance from Dur Sharrukin to this region on the Russian (Scythian) plain is in fact much less than the distance from Nineveh to Thebes in Egypt, a path taken by Assurbanipal several decades later. Under Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, Assyrian armies repeatedly invaded “Patursi and Kusi” —Upper Egypt and Ethiopia (Sudan). But Assyrian occupation of Scythia is not a mere conjecture: it is confirmed by archaeological evidence. “The earliest objects from Scythia that we can date,” writes a student of the region’s antiquities, “referred to the VIIth and VIth centuries B.C., are under overwhelming Assyrian influence. . .” [(6)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm#f_6)

The exiles who were removed from Samaria, a city of palaces and temples, no doubt, bewailed the capital they had heroically defended for three years against the army of what was, in its time, the world’s most powerful nation. Accordingly they might have called their new settlement Samaria (in Hebrew Shemer or Shomron; Sumur in the el-Amarna letters).

On the middle flow of the Volga, a city with the name Samara exists and has existed since grey antiquity. It is situated a short distance downstream from the point where the Volga and the Kama join. Russian conquerors of the ninth century found this city in existence. The medieval Arab geographer Yakubi, basing himself on accounts of the ninth-century traveller Ibn Fadlan, speaks of the Khazars who dwelt in Samara.[(7)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm#f_7) This people dominated southern and eastern Russia possibly as early as the third,[(8)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm" \l "f_8) but especially during the tenth and eleventh centuries. They passed the Caucasus mountains to participate in the wars of the Romans and the Persians, dominated the Ukraine as far as Kiev, concluded treaties with the emperors of Byzantium, and their influence and suzerainty sometimes reached as far west as Sofia.[(9)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm#f_9)

The ruling class of the Khazars used Hebrew as its language, and the Hebrew faith was the official religion in the realm of the Khazars. There was a system of great tolerance, unique in the Middle Ages, in respect to other religions; the Supreme Court was composed of two persons of Jewish faith, two Moslems, two Christians, and one idolater of the Russian population; but it was not a confusion of creeds as it had been in old Samaria, which tolerated many creeds, the monotheism of Yahweh being a protesting ingredient of the confusion.

Were the Khazars or their ruling aristocracy converted to Judaism in a later age? This position was based on what was said in a letter of the Khazar king Joseph, written about the year 961, to the Jewish grandee, Hasdai ibn-Shaprut, at the court of Cordoba. ‘Abd-al-Rahman al-Nasir, the Moorish ruler of Spain, had asked the King of the Khazars to provide any available information about his people, Hasdai’s brothers in religion. In the letter of reply the Khazar king recited a tradition or a legend; advocates of three religions came to some prior king of the Khazars, and he picked the Jewish faith because the Christian and the Mohammedan alike gave preferrence to the Jewish religion above that of their respective rival.[(10)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm" \l "f_10)

The story exposes its mythical character. In the seventh or eighth centuries of the present era, the adepts of the Jewish faith were persecuted by the Christians and also by the Moslems, and would hardly be chosen to become the religion of the state. A similar legend of “choosing” a religion is told about Vladimir of Kiev: in this legend the Khazars were the delegates representing the Jewish faith.

Had the Khazars been converted to Judaism, it would be almost incredible that they would call their city by the name Samara. Samaria was a sinful city from the point of view of the nation that survived in Palestine after the fall of Samaria, and out of which eventually grew the rabbinical Judaism of later centuries.

The conversion to the Jewish religion would also not imply the adoption of the Hebrew language. It is remarkable that the state language of the Khazars was Hebrew; the king of the Khazars was quite capable of reading and answering a Hebrew letter.

Long before the correspondence between Joseph and Hasdai of the tenth century, the Khazar monarchs had Hebrew names. The dynasts previous to king Joseph were in the ascending order: Aaron, Benjamin, Menahem, Nisi, Manasseh II, Isaac, Hannukah, Manasseh, Hezekiah, and Obadiah. A conversion to Judaism in the seventh or eighth century of the present era would bring with it names common to Hebrews in the early Middle Ages, like Saadia or Nachman; the Judaism of the early Christian age was rich in names like Hillel, Gamliel, while Hellenistic names like Alexander, or Aristobul were not infrequent. Again, the Biblical names of an early period would give prominence to names like Joab, Gideon, or Iftach, and still an older group of names would be Gad, Issahar, Zwulun or Benjamin.

It is peculiar that some of the king of the Khazars were called by the names used in Israel at the time that Samaria was captured by the Assyrians. Hezekiah is said to have been the king of Jerusalem at that time (II Kings 18:10), and the name of his son and successor was Manasseh. Obadiah was one of the most common names at that time and in the preceding century. It seems not arbitrary to assume that the Khazars absorbed, or even originally were, the remnants of some of the tribes of Israel.

It is most probable that the religious reform among the Khazars, about which some tradition was preserved until the tenth century, is to be interpreted as an act of purification of the half-pagan religion that the exiles from Samaria brought into and developed in their new abodes on the Volga, and as an act of return to the old Hebrew religion of Yahweh. This might have been performed with the help of some Hebrews who perchance left the schools of Sura and Pumbadita, where the Babylonian Talmud was composed. Old Jewish authors[(11)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm" \l "f_11) actually mention the fact that teachers of rabbinical Judaism were invited to the kingdom of the Khazars as early as the eighth century. Possibly, the name “Khazars,” despite a difference in writing, is to be interpreted as “Those Who Return.” A long, probably illiterate period, when Hebrew was used only in speech, may have preceded the period of revival of learning and purification of faith.

I would like to express here the belief that excavation in or around Samara on the Volga may disclose Hebrew signs of the eighth and seventh centuries before the present era. Other sites of old settlements on the Volga, too, may disclose remnants of old Hebrew culture.

The Hebrew (most probably also Assyrian) name for the Volga, Gozan, seems to have survived in the name Kazan. The city Kazan is located to the north of Samara, a very short distance beyond the place of confluence of the Volga and the Kama, two equally large streams. A tributary by the name Kazanka, or “small Kazan,” flows there into the Volga.

In the days of the Khazar realm, the river Volga was called not by its Assyrian, nor by its present name, but by the name Etel (the name is given also as Itil or Atil). This name appears to derive from a Semitic root; it is also used by the medieval Arab geographers.

Many place names in southern Russia seem to be of Hebrew derivation. The name of the river Don may go back to the name of the Israelite temple-city Dan. The Caspian Sea is best explained as “The Silver Sea” from the Hebrew *caspi* (of silver). Rostov means “The Good Harbor” in Hebrew. Orel, read in Hebrew, would mean “uncircumcised” ; Saratov may mean “to make an incision.” [(12)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm#f_12) With our identification of Gozan—one of the places of exile of the Ten Tribes—as the Volga, we may now investigate the question, what place is Khalakh, the other place of exile mentioned in II Kings 17:6? This place name is generally regarded as unidentifiable.

The eastern coast of the Black Sea was the goal of the Argonaut expedition in its search for the Golden Fleece. This expedition, engineered by Jason, was undertaken on the boat Argo. The land on the eastern coast of the Black Sea was called Colchis in ancient times, and the region is still known by this name. In Russian literature it is called Kolkhida.

I consider western Georgia—to which Colchis belongs, to be the Biblical Khalakh. Those of the expatriates of Samaria whose destination was Khalakh arrived there some decades after the Argonaut expedition, which was regarded by the later Greeks as an historical event and chronologically placed two or three generations before the Trojan War.[(13)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm#f_13)

In the mountainous region of western Georgia, adjacent to the Colchian coast, live the so-called Georgian, or Mountain Jews. They claim to be of the Ten Tribes of Israel, their ancestors having been exiled there upon the destruction of the kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians. Ben Zvi (the second president of the modern state of Israel) tells of these people and their claims.[(14)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm#f_14) He writes that “there is no reason to doubt the existence of a continuous Jewish settlement in both the north and south of Caucasia, whose roots were laid in very ancient times, perhaps as early as the days of the Second Temple, perhaps even earlier.” Yet he does not express any suspicion that Khalakh may have been Colchis.

The third place of exile of the Ten Tribes according to the Book of Kings were the “cities of the Medes.” Is it possible to locate also this last destination? The Medes first appear in Assyrian annals in the time of Shalmaneser III: it was in his days that they started to penetrate across the mountains of Iran to infringe on the boundaries of the Assyrian kingdom. They appear once again in the annals of Sargon II, who claims to have repelled “the distant Medes on the edge of the Bikni mountain.” [(15)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm#f_15) Some scholars maintain that the homeland of the Medes before their occupation of the Iranian plateau in the seventh and sixth centuries was in Turan, that is, West Turkestan. Sargon’s reference to “distant Medes” would then designate their homeland in Turan.

In this context it is interesting to note that the Jews of Bukhara, the great trading city and metropolis of West Turkestan, (Turan) claim direct descent from the Ten Tribes.[(16)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm" \l "f_16) Some writers are even prepared to admit the possible veracity of this claim,[(17)](http://www.varchive.org/ce/baalbek/khazars.htm" \l "f_17) though no one so far seems to have attempted to place the “cities of the Medes” in this region. While the greater part of the Jewish community of Bukhara may well be descended from migrants from the time of the Babylonian Exile or the Diaspora of Roman times or even later, it is not excluded that the oldest group among them are remnants of those tribes dispatched by Sargon to the “cities of the Medes.”

References

1. E.g., H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon* (New York, 1966), pp. 104, 557.
2. H. Graetz, *History of the Jews,* Vol. I (Philadelphia), p. 265.
3. [Cf. Strong’s *Concordance of the Bible,* p. 36 where (Hebrew section) *habor* is translated from the root word meaning “to join.” ]
4. [See *Atlas of the Bible,* (ed. by J. L. Gardener, 1981), p. 145; also consult W. Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon* (Brown, Driver, Briggs), p. 140, “Kebar” —“a river (or perhaps a canal) of Babylonia, not at present identified . . .” —LMG/WBS]
5. Luckenbill, *Records of Assyria* II, par. 54.
6. Ellis H. Minns, *Scythians and Greeks* (Cambridge, 1913), p. 263.
7. Yakubi, *Kitab al-Buldan,* 262 (in *Bibl. Geogr. Arab,* VII, ed. De Goeje).
8. Masudi hands down a tradition that the Sassanid king Ardashir fought against the Khazars. Masudi, *Muruj al-Dhabab,* ed. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille (Paris, 1861-78), VI, 124ff.
9. For general discussion and sources, see D. M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars,* (Princeton, 1954).
10. Cf. A. Koestler, *The Thirteenth Tribe,* pp. 63-64.
11. Jehudah bar Levi, *The Khazar.* [Such names were perhaps chosen to describe the inhabitants of the respective areas.—LMG]
12. [Herodotus (II. 104) reports that in his time the people of Colchis practiced circumcision and claimed descent from Egypt. Although his inquiries in Egypt evinced no remembrance of the Colchians from among the Egyptians, Herodotus concluded that they must have been descended from the remnants of the army of the semi-legendary Sesostris. It seems to me that the Colchians may have told Herodotus the Mosaic tradition of the Exodus from Egypt—if they were Jews, they would have had to answer in the affirmative the question posed by Greek historian, as to whether their ancestors had come from Egypt.—JNS]
13. Itzak Ben-Zvi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed* (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 62.
14. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria* II, par. 54. The location of “Bikni mountain” is uncertain.
15. See the eighteenth-century report of Joseph Maman of Tetuan, summarized in A. Ya’ari, “Emissaries of the Land of Israel” (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1951), p. 664.
16. Itzak Ben-Zvi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed,* p. 62.