

Where Is Mount Sinai?

By Hershel Shanks

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“It may well be that I have done no more than weave, in the words of George Eliot, ‘an ingenious web of probabilities—the surest screen a wise man can place between himself and the truth.’¹ Perhaps final truth in archaeology is unattainable, but it is certain that progress towards it can come only through asking questions, for without questions there can be no answers.”²



Where is Mt. Sinai? That’s hardly a new question. But it has recently been raised with a somewhat new focus—on a site known as Har Karkom in the Negev of Israel. In a word, is Har Karkom Biblical Mt. Sinai?

That was the central question of a two-day colloquium held in Israel last year that included a daunting, but thrilling, trip to the site itself.³

The investigation and study of Har Karkom has been the life work, not to say passion, of 83-year-old Italian archaeologist Emmanuel Anati. He has been documenting his finds at the site for more than 30 years.

He claims to have documented 1,300 archaeological sites at Har Karkom, including 40,000 rock engravings and more than 120 rock cult sites, such as small temples, standing stones (*masseboth*), tumuli, open-air altars, stone circles and other types of shrines. Most of the rock engravings, called petroglyphs, and rock cult sites are clustered at the base of Har Karkom.



While some of the petroglyphs and rock cult sites date as early as the Paleolithic era, our concerns center on a later 032 period, what Anati calls the BAC (Bronze Age Complex) that for him includes the Chalcolithic, Early Bronze and Middle Bronze I periods (c. 4300–2000 B.C.E.).⁴ At this time, according to Anati, Har Karkom was a “paramount ceremonial high place ... reserved for worship and religious ceremonies ... Access to the plateau may have been restricted to a few selected persons.”⁵ The Israelite Exodus from Egypt is usually dated to about 1200 B.C.E., a date that obviously presents problems for Anati’s identification of Har Karkom as Biblical Mt. Sinai. Of this, more later.

According to Anati, in the BAC period several thousand people lived here in seasonal, semi-permanent encampments. Anati claims that the Early Bronze Age people dedicated Har Karkom to the moon-god Sin. According to one study, the name Sinai derives from the name of the moon-god Sin.⁶ Numerous petroglyphs of cult scenes contain ibexes with their crescent-shaped horns, symbolizing the moon. In some of these petroglyphs the ibex is accompanied by a pair of footprints, suggesting that the ibex was worshiped (see opposite, lower right). Hence, the cult of the ibex at Har Karkom, the holy mountain.

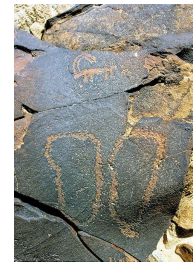
Perhaps the most famous petroglyphs from Har Karkom are a tablet with ten squares or partitions, suggesting the Ten Commandments Moses received on Mt. Sinai, and another depicting a serpent and a staff, recalling the episode in which Moses’ brother, Aaron, standing before Pharaoh turned a staff into a snake (*Exodus 7:10*) (see pp. 34–35). Among the rock cult sites are alignments of 12 standing stones, perhaps representing 12 tribes.

Anati observes that there are no parallels to Har Karkom in the Sinai Peninsula. “[How] could it be that such an outstanding Bronze Age holy mountain would not be mentioned in the Pentateuch?” Anati asks. Surely, it must be referred to—but the 033 034 name in the Bible is Mt. Sinai. Those who refuse to make the identification, in Anati’s view, “are not sufficiently acquainted with the discoveries.”⁷

When I greeted Anati at the colloquium, I reminded him of an article on Har Karkom he had written in **BAR** more than a quarter century ago.⁸ He needed no reminder; he remembered well. Following Anati’s **BAR** article, Israel Finkelstein of Tel Aviv University wrote an article sharply criticizing Anati’s claim.⁹ In Anati’s view, Finkelstein was dismissive, derogatory and not civil or scholarly. Finkelstein had described Anati’s then-recently published *The Mountain of God*,⁸ his book on the identification of Har Karkom as Mt. Sinai, as “an anachronistic vestige from the 19th century ... The academic community—archaeologists and Biblical scholars alike



—will, you may be sure, ignore this new revelation. The problem is that many laypeople with a genuine interest in the Bible and Biblical archaeology will be vulnerable to this kind of material.” And again: It is “important to [review a work like this] to save the trampled honor of archaeology as a serious scientific discipline and to protect the innocent mind of the lay public ... Anati’s interpretation of some of the finds ... belong to the world of faith, rather than the world of archaeology ... To sum up, [Anati’s] book reflects not a trace of the elementary skills required by the scientific discipline of archaeology.”



But this was Finkelstein, I said to Anati, not me. Anati countered that I should not have published Finkelstein’s article. When Finkelstein’s article appeared, Anati vowed never again to contribute to **BAR**.



Over the course of the colloquium, however, Anati and I had a number of cordial, even friendly, exchanges, despite the fact that I raised numerous questions regarding the equation of Har Karkom with Mt. Sinai.

The colloquium was not confined to a consideration of the question of Har Karkom=Mt. Sinai, however. A number of papers were presented contending that one or another site was Biblical Mt. Sinai. As speaker after speaker acknowledged that some 20 or more sites have been proposed as the Mountain of God, where the Lord had given the 035 Tablets of the Law to Moses, each scholar spoke with confident assurance that his suggestion was the correct one.⁹ As one speaker (Yoel Elitzur of Hebrew University) remarked, the number of different proposals “almost equals the number of researchers.”¹⁰



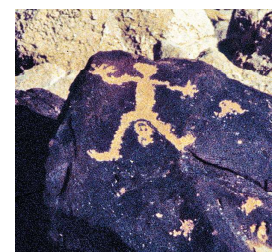
In the foregoing paragraph, I used the term Mountain of God, rather than Mt. Sinai. Generally, we speak of them as the same. But the Bible actually gives two names for the Mountain of God: Mt. Sinai and Mt. Horeb. Are they the same mountain, or are they different? The question remains open and in part accounts for the fact that so many different sites have been identified as the Mountain of God (or, more colloquially, as Mt. Sinai).



That we have so much difficulty identifying Mt. Sinai should not be surprising: Even the Israelites who settled in the land of Canaan and established a monarchy there didn’t know, as evidenced by the fact that Mt. Sinai never became a place of Israelite pilgrimage. This is in contrast to Shiloh, where the Tabernacle came to rest in the time of the Judges. It was an important place of pilgrimage (see *1 Samuel 1:3*).



Most of the colloquium papers assuredly identifying sites as Mt. Sinai were based on analyses of the route of the Exodus as described from site to site in the Bible. These analyses foundered, however, when they tried to use the Biblically described route of the Exodus as a road map, estimating how many miles the band of Israelites could travel in a day and what sites the Bible was referring to. Different books of the Bible seem to specify different routes, and the destination may be named Sinai or Horeb. And we don’t even know what the Sinai Peninsula was called in about 1200 B.C.E. (when the Exodus is generally dated) or earlier. One speaker noted that three different routes are indicated in three different Biblical books. How many days did it take to get from one place to another? Other questions arose as to what site was intended and where it was located.



And how far could the Israelites travel in a day?⁰³⁶ Of course, this would depend in large part on how many people were making the trip (see below).

Another kind of dissent to Anati’s thesis came from Davida Eisenberg-Degen of the Israel Antiquities Authority and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. She strikes at the heart of Anati’s argument, questioning the assertion that Har Karkom is a holy mountain. At the time Anati began his work at Har Karkom, she notes, little was known about rock art of the Negev.⁵ She recognizes that Anati was the first archaeologist to carry out a survey in the Negev oriented to rock art. In recent years, however, “a new spark of interest has been ignited in the Negev, and rock art has started to draw the attention of both academics and non-academic locals. We now know that rock art sites are scattered along the entire [area] reaching Sinai.” The number of rock art sites can be different depending on how they are counted. Some researchers tend to count in a fragmented fashion; others count in a clustered fashion. In Eisenberg-Degen’s analysis, based on newly available data, “The quantity of petroglyphs on Har Karkom is average for the central Negev.”

Eisenberg-Degen also expresses great doubt about Anati’s dating of the petroglyphs. At present, she says, there is no reliable way to date the petroglyphs. Neither size, subject nor patina formation provides a reliable method of determining

date, she says. In short, “The issue of dating has not been solved.”

Her conclusion: “Har Karkom is not significantly different from other central Negev rock art sites in quantity or motifs.¹¹

Naturally, archaeology also figured in the colloquium discussions. Perhaps surprisingly, archaeology presents a problem for the claim that Israelites encamped for 40 years in what we now identify as the Sinai Peninsula. Most scholars date the Exodus (to the extent that it is historical^d) to the end of the Late Bronze Age or the beginning of Iron Age I, that is, about 1200 B.C.E. Especially between 1967 and 1982, when Israel held the Sinai Peninsula, it was thoroughly surveyed by Israeli archaeologists—with negative results for this period. This is how Israeli archaeologist Itzhaq Beit-Arieh put it:

But what of the rest of Sinai at the end of the Late Bronze Age? This is the time of the Exodus ... Although there are dozens of theories [of the location of Mt. Sinai], none is supported by archaeological evidence. And much as we had hoped otherwise, our recent explorations have not advanced us toward a solution. Nowhere in Sinai did we or our colleagues find any concrete remains of the stations on the Exodus route, nor even small encampments that could be attributed to the relevant period. Neither did we discover anything that would help us identify the Mountain of God ...

There are thousands of ancient sites in Sinai, many of them predating the Exodus. The people who lived at many of these sites used pottery vessels, and the broken pottery sherds survived and have been discovered on the spot. Indeed, frequently they are found lying exposed on the surface after thousands of years ... If the poor indigenous nomads of the peninsula produced pottery vessels throughout the ages, there is no reason to suppose that the Israelites fleeing from the Land of Goshen had no pottery.^e

So why haven't they been found? How much of a problem this is may depend on how large the group of Israelites crossing the desert was. Here too there is a question: According to *Exodus 12:37* and *Numbers 1:46*, the Israelites on the Exodus included 600,000 men, plus children and “a mixed multitude.” If we add women to this, we get somewhere between two and three million people. How could they have spent 40 years in the desert at the end of the Late Bronze Age and left no mark?

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Most scholars put the number much lower. Regardless of the number of Israelites who escaped from Egypt, however, this remains a problem. As Harvard Professor Frank M. Cross put it:

Even if the group [of Israelites] was small, counted at most in hundreds rather than millions, as tradition in *Numbers (Numbers 1:46)* claims, they could not have survived for a generation in uninhabited Sinai—unless one takes at face value the legend of the heavens raining manna and the migration with miraculous frequency of myriads of quail (*Exodus 16:4–36*).¹²

Har Karkom was also empty at the end of the Late Bronze Age, so this would seem to be a problem for this site, too. Anati recognizes that there is “no evidence of human activities” in the vicinity of Har Karkom anywhere near the traditional date of the Exodus (Har Karkom was archaeologically empty from the beginning of Middle Bronze II [1750 B.C.E.] to Iron Age I [1200 B.C.E.]). Anati's evidence from Har Karkom comes from 800 years earlier *by his own dating*. Anati admits that if the traditional date of the Exodus (about 1200 B.C.E.) is accepted, “the identification of Har Karkom with the Biblical Mount Sinai would be out of the question.”¹³ Either he must move the date of his material 800 years later than he dates it, or he must move the date of the Exodus back 800 years from where most scholars place it. He chooses the latter alternative: The Exodus occurred, according to Anati, in about 2100 B.C.E., instead of 1200 B.C.E.

How does he move the date of the Exodus back 800 years? Answer: “The problem of the chronology of the Exodus exists only if one accepts that an exodus might indeed have taken place.”¹⁴ In Anati's view, the compilers of the Exodus story in the Bible, whenever they wrote it down, “had a visual idea of Mt. Sinai, and Har Karkom was the model that they had in front of their eyes.”¹⁵ If it did not exist, the authors could pick a holy mountain that they knew regardless of its location. The fact that their narration has “geographical coherence only indicates the topographical knowledge of the compilers. It does not demonstrate that the narrated events really happened.”¹⁶ Q.E.D.

Anati notes the mythical nature of elements of the Biblical story. For example, Moses' birth was hidden and the baby set in a basket of bulrushes caulked with bitumen which was then placed in 038 the river (*Exodus 2:2–3*). This is paralleled in the legend of the birth of Sargon the Great in the 23rd–22nd centuries B.C.E.:

My mother [...] conceived me. In secret she bore me.

She set me in a basket of rushes. With bitumen she sealed my lid.

She cast me into the river which rose not (over) me.¹⁷

The absence of any evidence of Israelite presence in Sinai in about 1200 B.C.E., when the Exodus is generally dated, presents a problem only for those who argue that Mt. Sinai is *in* the Sinai Peninsula. Anati, on the other hand, draws support for his early dating of the Exodus from the absence of evidence of habitation in the Sinai Peninsula at the generally accepted date of the Exodus. Anati's early date for the Exodus would solve a major problem for the historicity of the Biblical account. According to the Book of Joshua, the Israelites conquered Jericho, Ai and Arad. Archaeologists have shown that these three cities were not occupied in 1200 B.C.E. and therefore could not have been conquered at that time. These cities had actually suffered devastating destructions toward the end of the third millennium B.C.E. Most scholars, therefore, conclude that Joshua's account of the conquest of Canaan is not historical. Moving back the date of the Exodus, says Anati, solves this problem of the absence of occupation at these sites when Joshua was supposed to have destroyed them. "If there is a historical memory behind the Biblical texts, the chronology of the Exodus narration has to fit the archaeological evidence."¹⁸ His date for the Exodus claims to do this; the date most scholars accept for the Exodus does not.

As Anati colorfully put it at the colloquium:

In order to conquer Arad, Jericho and Ai, they must have been destroyed at the time they were conquered. If these towns were destroyed in the 22nd or 23rd centuries before Christ, the Exodus couldn't have taken place 1,000 years later. There is a Biblical description of vineyards and fields. We know that because of drought, the whole area of south Transjordan, where the people crossed, was abandoned at the end of the third millennium B.C.E. There was no habitation at the time of the 13th century B.C.E. But it is full of life: beautiful, fortified cities; fertile land in the third millennium B.C.E. So, how can you disconnect the two things? We have archaeological evidence—fantastic archaeological evidence—of the Biblical account. And by having certain wrong points in the dating, we are just destroying this evidence.

Anati confidently believes that other scholars will ultimately agree with him. "This is something people, whether they want it or not, are going to accept. It takes time. They are lazy. They don't read enough. They don't react to new things."

The absence of any evidence of occupation of Sinai in about 1200 B.C.E. figures prominently in another proposal supported by some of the world's most prominent scholars and archaeologists. It is called "the Midianite hypothesis." According to the Midianite hypothesis, the Israelites spent 40 years not in what we today call Sinai, but in Midian, centered, of all places, in northwestern Saudi Arabia.

Silly as it may initially sound, this proposal turns out to be firmly grounded both by the Biblical text and, more recently, by archaeology.

According to the Bible (*Exodus 2:15*), after Moses killed an Egyptian overseer and Pharaoh learned of it, Moses fled—to Midian! There he tended the flocks of Jethro, priest of Midian, and married Jethro's daughter Zipporah who bore Moses' son Gershom (*Exodus 2:16–22*). It was when Moses was tending Jethro's flocks in Midian that he received God's call at "the mountain of God" (Horeb) (*Exodus 3:1*): God would take the Israelites "out of the misery of Egypt" (*Exodus 3:17*). Moses asks Jethro for permission to go back to Egypt. "So Moses took his wife and sons,¹⁹ mounted them on an ass, and went back to the land of Egypt" (*Exodus 4:20*).



Later the band of Israelite escapees from Egypt was guided by Moses' Midianite father-in-law (*Numbers 10:29–32*). "The connections between Moses and the Midianites," as the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* puts it, "are manifold, detailed and remarkable (*Exodus 2–4, 18; Numbers 25, 31*)."²⁰ As James Kugel of Bar-Ilan University has observed: "It is striking that a number of Biblical texts—some of them, according to scholars, going back to the very oldest layers of the Hebrew Bible—connect the home of Israel's God with various sites to the southeast of Israel, the land once inhabited by Kenites and Midianites and Edomites."²¹

From the Bible, it thus seems pretty clear that Moses left Egypt and fled to Midian. That these Midianite connections are in fact historical is confirmed in a strange way—by the fact that the Midianites later became the Israelites' bitter enemies. On this basis, later tradents would have deleted the early Mosaic and Exodus traditions relating to the kindly Midianites were they not historically entrenched. As Frank Cross put it:

I am inclined to think, however, that old traditions that have no social function in later Israel—or traditions that actually flout later orthodoxy—that such traditions may preserve authentic historical memories, memories too fixed in archaic poetry to be revised out or suppressed ... Israel's epic singers did not preserve these [Midianite] traditions in order to sully the reputation of Moses. Evidently the Midianite traditions were too firmly established in the old sources to be forgotten or suppressed—and hence are probably historical in nucleus.²²

This so-called "Midianite hypothesis" was developed in the early 20th century chiefly by the great German exegete Eduard Meyer, long before there was any archaeological evidence to support it.²³

More recently, the Midianite hypothesis turns out to be supported by archaeology. In contrast to the empty Sinai at the

traditional date for the Exodus, Midianite territory in Saudi Arabia was thriving, full of Bedouin settlements. Emeritus professor Peter Parr of University College London, who conducted the leading surveys of this area in Saudi Arabia, calls this efflorescence of Midianite culture “oasis urbanism.”²⁴

The contrast between the Sinai and Midian in 040 about 1200 B.C.E. is stark. As Frank Cross summarizes the situation:

In recent years there have been intensive surveys of the archaeological remains of Midian ... Most striking perhaps is the discovery of a developed civilization in Midian at the end of the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age. At Qurayyah, a major fortified citadel has been discovered—a walled village and extensive irrigation systems. Characteristic pottery, called ‘Midianite’ or ‘Hejaz’ ware, radiates out from the northern Hejaz in this period into southern Transjordan and sites near Eilat, notably Timna.²⁵ Extraordinarily enough, it is wholly absent from the Sinai.²⁶

This Midianite pottery is distinctive, easily recognizable and quite attractive. Cross continues in his argument for the Midianite hypothesis:

The absence of material remains from Sinai in the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age—save for Egyptian mining establishments at Serābīt el-Khādem and Timna—comes as a surprise ... The Israeli 041 surveys of the Sinai have been intense, and the lack of archaeological remains from the crucial period becomes a very strong argument (from silence) against the peninsula of Sinai as the area in which Sinai-Horeb and Qadesh were located. Israel’s early contacts with Midian make sense in light of our present knowledge.²⁷



As Cross noted in a book of interviews we did together:

“FMC: ... The notion that the ‘mountain of God’ called Sinai and Horeb was located in what we now call the Sinai Peninsula has no older tradition supporting it than Byzantine times. It is one of the many holy places created for pilgrims in the Byzantine period.^f [See box on p. 40]

“HS: In the fourth century?

“FMC: Yes.

“HS: So you would place Sinai in what is today Saudi Arabia?

“FMC: You haven’t forgotten your skills in cross- (or Cross-) examination. Yes, in the northwestern corner of Saudi Arabia, ancient Midian.”²⁸

Fascinating new support for the Midianite hypothesis came at the Har Karkom colloquium—this time geological—from Shimon Ilani, an emeritus geologist with the Geological Survey of Israel. Ilani raises the question as to whether Mt. Sinai (or Mt. Horeb) was a volcano.

Read *Exodus 19:18*: “And Mount Sinai was all smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire: and the smoke ascended as the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mount trembled violently.”

In *Deuteronomy 5:22–24*, the voice of the Lord speaks “out of the fire.”

When the prophet Elijah returned to “Horeb, the Mountain of God” (*1 Kings 19:7–8*), “the Lord passed by. And a great and strong wind rent the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind, an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire, a still small voice” (*1 Kings 19:11–12*).

Ilani, a volcano expert, tells us: “The shattering gust of wind, the quaking and rumbling, the fiery conflagration, all emitting from an imposing peak, evoke nothing so much as a shattering initial volcanic explosion, followed by violent shuddering and a fiery exhalation, abating after the eruptive force is spent. The sequential description of wind-earthquake(-noise)-fire-silence is very close to what happens during an explosive volcanic eruption.”²⁹

Thus Exodus, Deuteronomy and Kings all describe Mt. Sinai as a volcanic mountain. If Mt. Sinai/Mt. Horeb was a volcano, this has great relevance for identifying the location of the site. In the Sinai Peninsula, there is no evidence of any volcanic activity. In Midian, Ilani tells us, volcanism has been active even in recent times—502 and 640 C.E.³⁰

The obvious next question is whether there is a mountain in Midian that qualifies. I asked

Frank Cross if he had even a guess as to which mountain in Midian Sinai was. “I really don’t,” he replied.³¹ But the only mountain we discussed was Jebel al-Lawz, near where Peter Parr found the citadel and walled village of Qurayyah, previously mentioned. Al-Lawz also happens to be the highest mountain in Midian—8,500 feet (8,465 feet, to be exact) above sea level. This compares with 2,500 feet for Har Karkom.



The special attraction of the Har Karkom colloquium was a visit to the site. It is in a military zone on Israel’s border with Egypt and cannot normally be visited during the week. Even seasoned Israelis have rarely visited the site. But the colloquium organizers obtained special permission to visit Har Karkom as part of the colloquium.

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We were also permitted to take the most direct route from the lecture hall in Mitzpe Ramon to Har Karkom—on the now-closed road bordering Egypt. This cut two hours from the trip each way. Our convoy of jeeps was provided with a military escort before and aft as we looked out within a few feet of the new Israeli fence securing the border with Egypt, which now has its own fence and road. A parallel dirt road in Israel on our right was examined for smugglers’ (or terrorists’) footprints each morning, we were told. From time to time a sign warned, “Firing zone on the left.”

Occasionally an Israeli military aircraft swooped past us with a deafening roar, an eerie contrast with the desolate Biblical *midbar* all around us. *Midbar* is usually translated as “wilderness,” but a wilderness with only minimal vegetation: Small plants follow the wadis that flow with water after the very occasional rains.

At the turn-off to Har Karkom, we began a 7-mile, one-hour trip into the *midbar*—up and down, twisting and turning, ignoring foot-high rocks and similar-sized potholes, almost rolling over, first on one side, then on the other. Finally, we arrived in the shadow of Har Karkom.

Truth to tell, it was a disappointment. Har Karkom is not a particularly dramatic site, at least within this overall dramatic environment. For Har Karkom is not really a mountain. It is a mesa-like plateau 2.5 miles long and half that wide. It rises about 2,500 feet. For comparison’s sake, the traditional Mt. Sinai opposite St. Catherine’s Monastery in southern Sinai rises about 7,500 feet.

On the other hand (it seems there is always “another hand” when it comes to Mt. Sinai), it will be a disappointment only to those who are expecting a “mighty mountain.” Nowhere in the Bible does it say that Mt. Sinai is a high mountain. Indeed, there is a Jewish tradition (as Yoel Elitzur pointed out to me) that God chose Mt. Sinai precisely because it is a low mountain, reflecting its humility. Drawing on the statement in *Proverbs 16:5*—“Every haughty person is an abomination to the Lord”—the Talmud, in the words of Reb Joseph, tells us that “The Holy One, blessed be he, ignored all the mountains and heights and caused his Shechinah [spirit] to abide upon Mount Sinai.”³²

Despite its lack of imposing height, however, Har Karkom is still a thrilling archaeological site, especially when accompanied by its excavator and surveyor Emmanuel Anati, who led our group on a tour of the petroglyphs and rock cult sites at the base of the mountain to prove his contention that Har Karkom was indeed the inspiration for Mt. Sinai.

After Anati’s tour, a small group of us sat under a tarp to protect us from the sun. I offered Anati some advice: “You have found a magnificent site. Har Karkom is in effect a site that you discovered and you excavated—your life’s work. You found marvelous things. You’re a world expert on rock art and geoglyphs. This is what you should emphasize.” Why not drop the Mt. Sinai idea which so few scholars seem to agree with?

Anati was full of energy—and confident: “I know that I am right. Many of my colleagues are very slow in thinking. It takes them time. You see, I have a top scientific preparation. I have a degree in archaeology at Hebrew University. I have a master’s in prehistory at Hebrew University. I have a master’s in anthropology at Harvard University. I have a doctoral degree from the Sorbonne in humanistic sciences. I have post-graduate research at Oxford. I was professor at Tel Aviv University until I got so bored that I found something else. There is no other scholar in Israel that has my preparation.

“There is a clan of Israeli mafia that don’t accept me. The hell with them! I don’t care about them. I can live very well without them. But they don’t accept me—why? Because I am successful, and they are envious of my success. Nobody else in Israel in my field has books published in 24 languages. My books are textbooks in China and Japan. Where else? In Korea, in Russia, everywhere, in Latin America.”

“One last question,” I responded. “Who is the beautiful woman sitting next to you?” Anati replied, “Ariela Fradkin. She has been my companion for the last 50 years. We got married in Oxford in 1963, just 50 years ago.”

Is Har Karkom Mt. Sinai? Anati is sure that it is. He is completely unyielding to uncertainty.

Footnotes:

- a. Emmanuel Anati, "Has Mt. Sinai Been Found?" **BAR** 11:04.
- b. Israel Finkelstein, "Raider of the Lost Mountain—An Israeli Archaeologist Looks at the Most Recent Attempt to Locate Mt. Sinai." **BAR** 14:04.
- c. See Davida Eisenberg-Degen, "Archaeological Views: The Archaeology of Scribbles," **BAR** 38:04.
- d. See Abraham Malamat, "Let My People Go and Go and Go and Go," **BAR** 24:01.
- e. Itzhaq Beit-Arieh, "Fifteen Years in Sinai." **BAR** 10:04.
- f. There was little or no discussion at the colloquium as to whether the traditional Mt. Sinai (adjacent to St. Catherine's Monastery) was in fact Mt. Sinai. It was simply not considered a candidate. As Cross notes, evidence of its identification as Mt. Sinai is no earlier than the Byzantine period, when it was identified to Egeria, a Christian pilgrim who was searching for the site in the late fourth century C.E., at which time monks were living there.

Endnotes:

1. George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, in George Eliot, *The Works of George Eliot*, vol. 1–2 (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1878–85), vol. 1, p. 436.
2. Peter J. Parr, "Further Reflections on Late Second Millennium Settlement in North West Arabia," in Joe D. Seger, ed., *Retrieving the Past: Essays on Archaeological Research and Methodology in Honor of Gus W. Van Beek* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), p. 217.
3. The Mount Sinai: Mount Karkom? colloquium was held May 12–13, 2013, in Mitzpe Ramon, Israel. It was organized by the Centro internazionale di studi preistorici ed etnologici (CISPE), the Tourism Department of the Mitzpe Ramon Municipality, the Dead Sea and Arava Science Center and the Har HaNegev Field School.
4. "In the entire area of concession, no evidence was found of human activity from the beginning of Middle Bronze Age II to Iron Age I. Such a hiatus may raise a double query: Either no connection is possible between Har Karkom and the Biblical story of Exodus, or the conventionally attributed dates for Exodus must be reconsidered. After the period of intense occupation in BAC times, the plateau and the valleys around it were abandoned from c. 1950 B.C. to 1050 B.C." Emmanuel Anati, *Is Har Karkom the Biblical Mount Sinai?* (Brescia: Atelier, 2013), p. 19.
5. Anati, *Har Karkom*, pp. 13, 15.
6. Rosetta Bastoni Brioschi, "Arte rupestre di Har Karkom e il suo contesto ambientale," *Valcamonica Symposium '94*, 1994, p. 3. Rosetta Bastoni Brioschi, "Arte rupestre: Har Karkom e il dio Sin," *B.C. Notizie* (1997), pp. 22–25.
7. Anati, *Har Karkom*, pp. 37, 46.
8. Emmanuel Anati, *The Mountain of God* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986).
9. Anati is no exception: "Har Karkom is the only locality, among those proposed for Mount Sinai, which fits without any effort into all these co-ordinates." Anati, *Har Karkom*, p. 59.
10. See Frank Moore Cross: "A mountain of paper has been expended in attempting to locate the stations of the Exodus in *Numbers* 33. There are almost as many opinions as there are scholars." Hershel Shanks, *Frank Moore Cross—Conversations With a Bible Scholar* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1994), p. 17.
11. Davida Eisenberg-Degen, "Har Karkom in Context, Rock Art Sites of the Negev" (paper presented at the Mount Sinai: Mount Karkom? colloquium, Mitzpe Ramon, Israel, May 12–13, 2013).
12. Shanks, *Frank Moore Cross*, p. 21.
13. Emmanuel Anati, "Har Karkom: Archaeological Discoveries on a Holy Mountain in the Desert of Exodus" (paper presented at the Out of Egypt conference, UC San Diego, June 2013), p. 3.
14. Anati, *Har Karkom*, p. 65.
15. Anati, *Har Karkom*, p. 46.
16. Anati, *Har Karkom*, pp. 65–66.
17. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 119.
18. Anati, *Har Karkom*, p. 80.
19. Zipporah later bore Moses a second son, Eliezer (*Exodus* 18:4).
20. George E. Mendenhall, "Midian," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 816.
21. James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 2007), p. 424.
22. Shanks, *Frank Moore Cross*, pp. 27–28.
23. Eduard Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums* (Stuttgart and Berlin: J.G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1921).
24. Parr, "Further Reflections," p. 213. See also Peter J. Parr, "Midian," in Eric M. Meyers, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, vol. 4 (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), p. 25.
25. The painted ware at Timna was found to be petrographically identical to the painted ware at Qurayyah. See Beno Rothenberg and Jonathan Glass, "The Midianite Pottery," in John F.A. Sawyer and David J.A. Clines, eds., *Midian, Moab and Edom, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series No. 24 (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1983), pp. 65–124. The Timna pottery was "probably imported from Midian." See Caroline Grigson, "Camels, Copper and Donkeys in the Early Iron Age of the Southern Levant: Timna Revisited," *Levant* 44 (April 2012), p. 83. Other Hejazi sites include Tayma and Al-Ula (Dedan).
26. Frank M. Cross, *From Epic to Canon* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998), pp. 63–64.
27. Cross, *Epic to Canon*, p. 66. See also Shanks, *Frank Moore Cross*, p. 15.

28. Shanks, *Frank Moore Cross*, p. 14.
29. Shimon Ilani, "The Location of Mount Horeb According to Exodus, Deuteronomy and 1 Kings: Geographical and Geological Implications" (paper presented at the Mount Sinai: Mount Karkom? colloquium, Mitzpe Ramon, Israel, May 12–13, 2013).
30. Ilani cites Victor E. Camp, Peter R. Hooper, M. John Roobol and D.L. White, "The Madinah Eruption, Saudi Arabia: Magma Mixing and Simultaneous Extrusion of Three Basaltic Chemical Types," *Bulletin of Volcanology* 49 (April 1987), pp. 489–508.
31. Shanks, *Frank Moore Cross*, p. 26.
32. B.T., Sotah 5a.

SIDEBAR

The Case for (or Against) Jebel Musa



040

It is not entirely clear why the traditional site of Mt. Sinai in the south-central Sinai that rises above St. Catherine's Monastery was first identified as the place where Moses received the Tablets of the Law. No objective reason can be given. There are neither archaeological nor historical reasons for the identification.^a The mountain so sanctified by tradition is not even the highest peak in the region.¹

In the mid-third century, early Christian hermits like St. Anthony sought spiritual refuge in the Eastern Desert of Egypt. From there, the practice of monasticism spread eastward into the Sinai

Peninsula in the early Byzantine period. Some of these sites in the Sinai associated with monks and monasteries developed traditions regarding the location of Mt. Sinai. One of them was Jebel Musa, the Mountain of Moses in Arabic. Another was Jebel Serbal, also in the southern Sinai, with the well-watered Wadi Feiran at its base.²

Jebel Musa was a major contender by the time of the fourth-century visit by a pilgrim named Egeria, some of whose accounts have survived. Accompanied by Sinai monks, Egeria was shown not only the Mountain of God, but even "the cave where holy Moses was when he had gone up again into the Mount of God, that he might receive the second tablets after he had broken the former ones when the people sinned."^b

At the foot of this mountain was a church built around a plant identified as the burning bush in which an angel of the Lord had appeared to Moses. "The bush though on fire was not consumed" (*Exodus 3:2*).

When the Emperor Justinian replaced the church with a fortress-monastery dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the late sixth century, the mountain's identification with the Mountain of God became sealed in Christian belief. The official reason for the construction of this fortress-monastery was because the monks in the Sinai had petitioned the emperor to build it to protect them against marauding nomads. But it also served, along with other nearby monasteries, to secure the vulnerable eastern and southern flanks of Justinian's empire. In the 12th century, the monastery was rededicated to St. Catherine, as it is still known today.—**R.N.**

Footnotes:

- a. See Israel Finkelstein and Aviram Perevolotsky, "The Southern Sinai Exodus Route in Ecological Perspective," **BAR** 11:04.
- b. See "Past Perfect: A Pilgrim on Mt. Sinai," **BAR** 33:01.

Endnotes:

1. <http://www.allsinai.info/sites/geology.htm>.
2. Joseph J. Hobbs, *Mount Sinai* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).



Zev Radovan/www.biblelandpictures.com

Jebel Musa

Where Is Mount Sinai?

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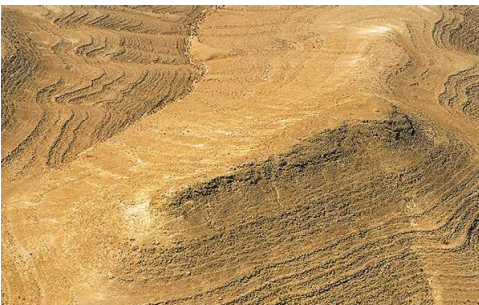
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Hershel Shanks

MT. SINAI? Archaeologist Emmanuel Anati, standing before Har Karkom, claims it is the mountain of God that the Biblical authors envisioned when they referred to Mt. Sinai. Located in the southern Negev near today's border between Israel and Egypt, this flat ridge and its valleys are where Anati discovered 1,300 archaeological sites, including 40,000 rock engravings and more than 120 rock cult sites.



Emmanuel Anati

FROM THE AIR. Rising 2,700 feet above sea level and measuring roughly 2.5 miles long and half as wide, Har Karkom is

a relatively modest mountain ridge. The archaeological evidence suggests to the excavator that a unique religious center existed here from 4300 to 2000 B.C.E. and served as the inspiration for Biblical Mt. Sinai. To make the evidence fit the Biblical account, however, Anati pushes the date of the Exodus back 800 years from the traditional date of about 1200 B.C.E.



Hershel Shanks

ROCKY RELIGIOUS CENTER. Standing next to a circle of large rocks, Emmanuel Anati interprets such clusters as rock cult sites. At Har Karkom, these rock cult sites are composed of what the excavator believes to be small outdoor temples, standing stones, tumuli, open-air altars, stone circles and other types of shrines. Anati believes such rock formations demonstrate Bronze Age religious worship.



Emmanuel Anati

MOON WORSHIP? Rock engravings that appear to depict cult scenes are plentiful at Har Karkom. Anati suggests the Bronze Age people dedicated this mountain to the moon-god Sin, from which the name Sinai may be derived. Well represented in the rock art, ibexes, with their crescent-shaped horns, may have symbolized the moon.



Emmanuel Anati

On one rock, an ibex accompanied by a pair of footprints may suggest that ibexes were worshiped at this cult center.



Emmanuel Anati

DEVOTIONAL GRAFFITI? Some rock art at Har Karkom seems to depict well-known Biblical motifs. A rectangular grid divided into ten spaces suggests the Ten Commandments Moses received on Mt. Sinai.



Emmanuel Anati

A vertical line next to a curvy line may represent a staff and snake, recalling the story of Moses' brother, Aaron, turning a staff into a snake as he stood before Pharaoh.



Emmanuel Anati

A human figure and a vertical line perhaps portray an act of worship.



Emmanuel Anati

Two concentric circles surrounded by radiating lines may symbolize the "eye of God."



Emmanuel Anati

GIVING BIRTH. An upright figure with hands outstretched and legs spread apart, from which an upside-down smiling face protrudes, depicts the act of childbirth, according to Anati.



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ARABIAN CONTENDER. Some scholars propose that Mt. Sinai was located in ancient Midian, in northwest Saudi Arabia. In contrast to the Sinai Peninsula, where archaeologists found no evidence of habitation during the traditional date for the Exodus, Midianite territory was thriving at the end of the Late Bronze Age and beginning of the Iron Age. The imposing Hejaz mountains dominate the landscape of western Arabia. Among these mountains is the 8,500-foot-high peak of Jebel al-Lawz, a prime candidate for Mt. Sinai.



Roger Wood, Dept. of Antiquities, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

FLEEING TO MIDIAN. This distinctive painted ware from Qurayyah in northwest Saudi Arabia is typical pottery of the Midianites, among whom Moses is said to have settled after fleeing Egypt. According to the Bible, Moses tended the flock of Jethro, the priest of Midian, and married Jethro's daughter. While tending Jethro's flock, Moses came to the "mountain of God" and there received God's call.



Peter Parr

This distinctive painted ware from Qurayyah in northwest Saudi Arabia is typical pottery of the Midianites, among whom Moses is said to have settled after fleeing Egypt.



Beno Rothenberg, *Timna* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p. 160, fig. xxiv

MIDIANITES IN ISRAEL. Midianite ware radiated out from northwest Saudi Arabia in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages into what is now southern Israel. Midianite pottery, including this juglet, was found in an Egyptian temple at Timna in the Negev desert. By contrast, Midianite pottery did not make its way into the Sinai Peninsula.

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