

## THE MOUNTAIN THRONE OF JAHVEH.

By JOSEPH OFFORD.

IN a note on "Semitic Names and Conceptions" in the *Quarterly Statement*, 1917, pp. 139–140, allusion, with references, was made to the adoption of certain mountain summits in Palestine and the Southern Desert as sacred sites suitable for worshipping Jahveh as dwelling there; sites which were at times consecrated to His service, before the Ark and its fiery Shekinah were placed in the Zion temple. Some parallels with such cults, especially those of Baal, were drawn, and at p. 181 an inscription from Gezer was quoted associating Jahveh with Baal Ina. An Egyptian papyrus at Petrograd names sites in Syria (*Ru*-ša'-ā-ra), "God's summit"; also one *Rušakadš(a)*.

Of course, such instances might have been extended to pagan worship of other races who selected mountains as the homes of deities such as Zeus Lykaios and Olympos, and Laphytos and Artemis Laphria, or Apollo Ptoos; but such Hellenic concepts had no part in producing similar ones among the Hebrews.<sup>1</sup>

With the Mesopotamians, however, there was a close connection, and if we find this is manifested from the Old Testament side as well as from cuneiform writings, it is merely one more proof of the accuracy of the statements as to his environment in the land of the Chaldees from which Abraham came, and a proof that the records of Hebrew developments towards monotheism have been faithfully preserved from very primitive times.

The Babylonian deities, especially Shamash, Sin, and Ishtar, were associated with double-peaked mountains; Sin because of his lunar crescent symbolism, and Ishtar-Astarte-Ashteroth from the crescent of her associate planet Venus, whose phases were known, whence the name Ashteroth Karna'im in 1 Macc. v, and also in her title in Phoenician inscriptions. A temple seated between two mountains near Carthage was dedicated to her.

<sup>1</sup> The "I am" Yahveh is much like the mystic utterance given to man after Deucalion's Flood by the priestess oracle at Dodona: "Zeus was, Zeus is, Zeus shall be." So Neith, goddess of Saïs, had for motto: Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ πᾶν τὸ γέγονος καὶ οὐ καὶ ἐσομένον.

Shamash, who is shown on Babylonian cylinders standing or emerging between two mountains, was supposed to make the hollow between their bases his throne or seat of majesty.

Sinai-Horeb,<sup>1</sup> before the Exodus a sacred dwelling of Sin, the two-peaked Moon-god, doubtless included two peaks of the range of Paran, so as to be a Karnaim for that deity. This ancient symbolism is hinted at in the duplicate names for this house of Jahveh in the Pentateuch—Zion and Ophel. According to the Tell el-Amarna tablets, Jerusalem was also the dwelling place of Ninib, or Nirig, one of whose names was Madanunu, the “high,” or “renowned.” The anthropomorphic concepts producing the mountain association with the dwelling of deity were certainly due to their often being clothed in mysterious clouds, and also to the storms which in Western Asia gather around their summits, often causing a mighty rushing wind to descend to the plain.<sup>2</sup>

Consider the vivid flash of the lightning fires and the appearance as of fire, or the holocaust upon an altar of the peak as tinted by rays of the rising and setting sun, whilst the lowlands lay in darkness. If these phenomena are borne in mind, many of the statements concerning Jahveh and His abodes, including some symbolism of the Tabernacle, and even of the Temple, will become simple. “The Lord came from Sinai and rose up from Seir, he shined forth from Mount Paran” (Deut. xxxiii, 2). “The mountain of God, even Horeb,” depict Jahveh as dweller upon the summits,<sup>3</sup> but other statements, especially those of Exod. xxxiii and xxxiv, throw much further light upon our enquiry. There Moses was bidden to come to God at Sinsi’s summit as being His residence;

<sup>1</sup> Horeb was Har-ha-Elohim, as was Sinai. The later rival peaks of Samaria, Ebal and Gerizim, doubtless a duplicate divine mountain seat of primitive times, was an Amorite adoption of the Mesopotamian double-mountain home of God. Ebal and Gerizim were not always placed at Shechem. Deut. xi, 30, shows them at Gilgal-Bethel.

<sup>2</sup> There was another concept (in this connection) with Yahveh’s Mount being in the north, perhaps, because the never-setting Polar star symbolised eternity. Ezekiel (i, 4-14) tells of the great cloud and fire, and out of the midst an amber colour and fire. But there also came the living creatures, the *merkabah*, or Yahveh’s throne supporters, *khayyoth*. In chap. x we see he knew of their assimilation to the Cherubim. There is a small Mesopotamian relief showing the Deity seated upon a throne supported at the corners by living creatures (quadrupeds). A copy may be seen in Jeremias’ *Old Testament in the Light of the Ancient East*.

<sup>3</sup> Exod. iii, 1.

and we also gather from this story what form the Deity assumed, and hear of the presence upon the holy mount of a cave, as upon so many sacred mountains elsewhere.

In Exod. xxxiii, 12-23, and xxxiv, 2, Moses was to ascend to meet Israel's God at Sinai's top, as in Chapter xix ("The Lord came down upon Sinai and called Moses to the top"). But there was needed a shelter for poor humanity that its representative might not be destroyed by gazing upon the effulgent glory, so there was the protective cave. The light in midst of the cloud flashed like *hashmal*, Assyrian *Eshmaru*, with which they overlaid temple pavements.

That Jahveh Elohim had a sort of throne formed of the curve between two Paran mountains is confirmed by Zech. vi, where four chariots defile out from between two mountains. They were: "Four spirits which came forth from standing before the Lord." In Midrash Rabba iii, 38, it says: "God will come with His four horses (Merkabah) to Sinai." Now in 1 Chron. xxviii, 18, the Cherubim are these Merkabah. The throne-bearers in Ezekiel's imagery of God's throne are also Merkabah. The Midrash proves that the mystical Rabbis knew of the connection between the Mountain Throne Seat and Mercy Seat.<sup>1</sup>

At this point attention should be called to the primitive idea as to the shape assumed by Jahveh when He manifested Himself. The protective cave was not His dwelling, but His form was imagined to be that of a gigantic man because his hand sheltered Moses from seeing his sacred majesty. Without wishing in any way to diminish the sacredness of these primitive concepts, it may be conjectured that their origin was partly in some reflective phenomenon upon the cloud mist, which appeared to some as of a gigantic figure like the Brocken. So also some ideas of the signs shown in the desert wanderings may be derived from the fantastic productions of the mirage.<sup>2</sup>

In Exod. xxiv, 10, seventy-three of the Israelites ascend the mountain and view Jahveh in safety, but the part of His form

<sup>1</sup> See also Exod. xxiv, 12 and 16, where the glory of the Lord abode six days upon Sinai, and was like a consuming fire, and Moses went as far as into the cloud. Ovid (*Metamorphoses*), writing of Phaeton approaching the untempered solar light, says: *Consistitque procul, neque enim propriora ferebat Lumina.*

<sup>2</sup> The mountain was only Jahveh's sublunary place of call. In Elijah's theophany, when the mountain shook, He was not the storm itself, but Jahveh Shamaim above the earth—"The Lord was not in the earthquake."

visible to them appears to have only been His feet, for they were not very high up. These feet rested upon a paved platform like a sapphire stone. To receive the Commandment tablets Moses was summoned to ascend to a loftier spot. Bearing in mind the symbolism here summarised, and turning to Exod. xxxiii, we can clearly see that Jehovah was once supposed not only to leave His heavenly seat for a mountain top when communicating with men, but when He was semi-personified by the light between the horns (Karnaim) or peaks of the Ark, which was guarded by the "Tent of Meeting," the steps ordered for Moses to take when he desired to communicate with Jahveh there, and Jahveh's proceedings in such a case are seen to be repetitions of the old mountain drama.<sup>1</sup> The door of the Tent of Meeting is duplicate of the cavern's mouth. Jahveh was not in the tent any more than in the cave. Moses enters the tent, but Jahveh descends enshrouded in a cloud to protect His worshipper from the terror of His glory, whilst Moses, as at the cave-scene, stands at the tent door. Whether Jahveh in the cloud was supposed to have come down to the plain from Sinai or from heaven as Jahveh Shamaim is not specified, but as the narrative is so early and so further elucidated, as we shall see, by a story of Elijah, the former is probably the case.<sup>2</sup>

To prevent any failure to detect the summit symbolism of the Tent of Meeting, the Ark was to be made of acacia wood, the only timber which grows upon Sinai, as thus connected with the Creator Deity. The LXX calls it *ξύλον ἀσηπτον*, "The Wood of Life." Later on, Jahveh's presence was, to a certain extent, conceived of as being partly manifest in the Shekinah. According to Jewish tradition

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps no more pertinent parallel of these primitive views of Jahveh, with similar thought, elsewhere can be given than Homer's imagery of God upon Ida's Mount:—

" Now the Eternal shook His sable shield (the cloud)  
 That shaded Ida, and all the subject field  
 Beneath its ample verge. A rolling cloud  
 Involved the Mount: the thunder pealed aloud,  
 The affrighted hills from their foundations nod  
 And blaze beneath the lightnings of the God."

<sup>2</sup> The sapphire footrest of the Sinai Deity later became the Kapporet of the Temple Ark—"The place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet" (Ezek. xlivi, 7). Shekinah does not occur in Scripture. This light, passing from the Cherubim's summits to each other over the Mercy Seat, imitated the electric flashes from the arms of the Mountain Seat of God.

it was first in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. This does not appear in the earlier Jewish history ; neither does it seem to have been accepted by the inner circle of seers and prophets. These, acquainted with the esoteric knowledge, did not think it safe to seek intercourse with Jahveh there. During the later desert wanderings we possess the primitive stratum of the views of Moses and the people. To them, to adopt a modern phrase, the Tabernacle Tent of Meeting was Jahveh's Selamlik, just as the mountain cavern was or had been. At the latter no sacrifices were offered. For the Tabernacle these commenced when it contained the Ark, which, during some previous period, appears to have been in the custody of Ephraim.<sup>1</sup>

These sacrifices were continued at the Temple of Zion, which contained the Ark. But as late as the time of Elijah it was not deemed possible to really commune with Jahveh at the Temple ; His dwelling place was not actually therein. In 1 Kings xix, Elijah, anxious to ask the commands of Jahveh, to make certain of being able to communicate with Him, proceeded first to Beersheba, and then for forty days through the Wilderness. At Beersheba the Angel of the Lord came to him, but that was not the place for interviewing Jahveh. To attain that privilege he needs must reach "the Mount of God"; only when he reached the sheltering cave (v. 9) "There came, not Jahveh, but the Word of God."

Then the old summit drama is re-enacted, and consequently that of the Tent of Meeting door porch.<sup>2</sup> Elijah (v. 13) stands at the cave's entrance, being ordered to "go forth and stand before the Lord." He passes by whilst a great wind rends the rocks and the earth shakes, but the Lord was not in the wind nor the earthquake. Lightning illumined momentarily the inspiring scene, but neither was he in that dread fire. It does not clearly appear that Jahveh came. Elijah expected Him, and hearing the voice,

<sup>1</sup> Had no sacrifices been prescribed for the Tabernacle Temple, it is a question whether, humanly speaking, even a select few of the people could have been kept from attending the competing pagan shrines which possessed them. 1 Sam. iv, Ichabod shows God's glory, Kabod departed with the loss of the ark.

<sup>2</sup> The door-posts of a Hebrew's house, and of the Tabernacle and subsequent Temple, were *mezuzah*, Exod. xii, 7, Assyrian *manzazu*, "pillars, standing pieces." When the Assyrians saw the obelisks at the Egyptian temple gates, they called them *manzazu*. The Jews affixed *mezuzoth* later to the doorposts (Ezek. xlivi, 8) : "Their threshold by Mine, and their posts by My posts," says the Lord.

he being in terror, well within the sacred cave, went out, for further protection wrapping his head in his mantle. Then the voice gave the response sought for.<sup>1</sup>

It is questionable whether the Old Testament writers ever imagined Jahveh elsewhere on earth than upon some mountain. In the wanderings they were led, not by Him, but by His angel. The Elohist story quoted of the seventy elders and the three special elect going partly up Sinai, when Moses, at a more lofty height, stood before the sacred cave to meet Jahveh, is duplicated by the "Jahvist version" of Numb. xi, 16 *seq.*, where the seventy are there said to have gone to the door of the Tent of Meeting, a striking confirmation that the lowland Tabernacle is symbolic of the divine mountain.

But to meet Moses at the lower level God sends word: "I will come down." He was temporarily to descend from Sinai. If, as conservative scholars contend, there is no real contradiction between the two series of records, the Elohist and Yahvist, then Jahveh in the cloud and fire pillar acted as leader by means of his "angel," and was not personally embodied therein. The suggestion made, *supra*, that the two heights at Jerusalem constituted the God of Israel's throne, probably best explains Isa. ii, 2, where the mountain of the House of Jahveh, is to be established on the summit of the mountains.

The words of Our Lord when conversing with the Samaritan woman, speaking of her people's mountain deity ("You know not whom"), had a hidden reference behind them connected with a recent event. Subsequent to the cruelties of Antiochus at Jerusalem, "the Samaritans said they were not Jews, but Sidonians, and requested permission to dedicate their Mount Gerizim temple to Jupiter Hellenius, as before it had been without a name" (Josephus, *Wars*, V, v, 121). This allegation was probably incorrect, but the invariable hesitation to disclose the real pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton may be meant. Probably they would have invoked the God Jahveh Shamaim, under the form of Zeus Upsistos, so as to avoid detection by Greek neighbours.

<sup>1</sup> M. Jules Morgenstern shows that Solomon's Temple, דְבִיר and the Tabernacle Holy of Holies symbolised the mountain cave. Such sacred chambers were parts of Semitic shrines. From Phoenician, the 𐤁ୱୱ, etymologically becoming the Greek μύαπον, the oracular cave chamber of primitive Hellenic sanctuaries.

The instances of El-Shaddai being two mamelons, or hill breasts, and so God "the nourisher," were discussed in a previous paper. The horned Ashteroth connection with two hills appears most forcibly in Syriac, where the name may be read as "one whose teats are milk-filled." The Pentateuch knows her as the deity of the mysterious Rephaim (see Gen. xiv, 5).

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## THE GYPSIES OF PALESTINE.

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THE Sultanieh Geographical Society of Cairo has appointed, as a special subject for study and the composing of a thesis, a "Monograph upon the Gypsies of Egypt." The enquiry to embrace the Beledi, Ghagar, and the Nawar, and a comparison with the Palestine gypsies is suggested as highly desirable. The direction terminates by stating that no work upon the subject has been issued since the year 1800.

This assertion is to a certain extent erroneous, because, only a few years ago, Prof. R. A. Stewart Macalister, in one of the series of the Gypsy Lore Society of Liverpool publications, entitled, "The Language of the Narwar, or Zutt Nomad Smiths of Palestine," issued a work upon them. It is to be hoped that in future better arrangements for the interchange of French with British scientific publications will be made, so that both countries will be more cognisant of each other's work.

Herr Seetzen collected and edited a preliminary vocabulary of the Turkish gypsies in the neighbourhood of Beirut, but Prof. Macalister's book is much fuller, including some 1,300 words, many of which, however, are identical with or are derivations of Arabic. These are all indicated, so that students using the vocabulary as basis for work upon the Narwar dialect can easily select the words peculiar to it. The dictionary is based upon a series of some one hundred stories recited to Prof. Macalister in what is termed the Nuri of the Nawar by a member of their tribe, a few families of