

A photograph of a volcanic eruption. A large, billowing plume of grey ash rises from the top of a dark, silty volcano. A bright red, glowing lava flow is visible on the left side of the volcano, cascading down its slope. The sky is a pale, hazy grey, suggesting a thick atmosphere of ash and smoke.

Fire on the Mountain

Geography, Geology & Theophany
at Jabal al-Lawz

Glen A. Fritz

FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

Geography, Geology & Theophany

at Jabal al-Lawz

Glen A. Fritz

Glen A. Fritz © 2016

Published by GeoTech, San Antonio, TX
www.AncientExodus.com
geo@satx.rr.com

PDF version: 160808

ISBN 978-0-692-69985-0

Summary:

In recent decades, attention has been drawn to the *Jabal al-Lawz* mountain range in northwest Saudi Arabia as a possible location of the Mount Sinai of the biblical Exodus. Within this range, *Jabal al-Maqla* has been singled out as a candidate due to its geographical, archaeological, and geological character. But, corroboration has been limited by lack of access and objective data, sometimes leading to misstatements and flawed conclusions by investigators and critics alike. Although this work is not intended to verify a Mount Sinai location, it does aim to answer many questions about the *Jabal al-Lawz* region by providing a detailed geographical, archaeological, and geological overview.

In regard to geology, some investigators have opined that the black rock at the summit of *Jabal al-Maqla* represents granite that was “burnt” by supernatural heat during the Mount Sinai events. The propriety of this premise is assessed with geological data and analysis of rock specimens from the mountain.

An analysis of the biblical support for the “burnt mountain” proposition is also presented. The Bible depicts the phenomena at Mount Sinai as a theophany, using fire and smoke metaphors and similes, but it creates little expectation for supernatural geological change, regardless of the mountain’s location.

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
FORWARD	x
PREFACE.....	xii
CHAPTER 1: THE ROOTS OF THE INTRIGUE.....	1
1.1 Midian.....	1
1.2 A Mount Sinai Location.....	2
1.3 Recent History of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	4
1.4 The Saudi Arabia Side of the Story	4
1.5 Criticism of the <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Accounts.....	6
1.6 Barriers to Further Investigation.....	6
CHAPTER 2: THE GEOGRAPHY OF <i>JABAL AL-LAWZ</i>	9
2.1 Midian Considerations.....	9
2.2 The Mountain Ranges at Midian.....	10
2.3 Midianite Pottery and Qurayyah.....	13
2.4 <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i>	14
2.5 <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	14
2.6 The Mountain Names.....	17
2.7 <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Topography	18
2.8 The <i>Wadi Abyad-Wadi Rayt</i> Divide.....	26
2.9 Travel Routes to <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	29
2.10 The Northern Route	29
2.11 The Southern Route	30
2.12 Hisma Vegetation.....	32
2.13 Summarizing the Midian and <i>Lawz</i> Geography.....	33
2.14 Conclusion	34
CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY INSIGHTS.....	35
3.1 The Rationale for Moses' Excursion to the Mountain.....	35
3.2 Historical Links Between Midian and Mount Sinai.....	36
3.3 The Prominence of Mount Sinai	39
3.4 The Distance from Egypt.....	40
3.5 Historical Geography Conclusion.....	40

CHAPTER 4: <i>JABAL AL-LAWZ</i> ARCHAEOLOGY	41
4.1 The History of <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> Archaeology.....	41
4.2 Introducing the Archaeological Sites in the <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> Vicinity	44
4.3 The “Cemetery”	46
4.4 Unknown Fenced Site #1	53
4.5 The Masyoon Site	54
4.6 Unknown Fenced Site #2	54
4.7 The Petroglyphs Site.....	55
4.8 Conclusion	62
CHAPTER 5: ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AT <i>JABAL AL-MAQLA</i>	63
5.1 The Petroglyph Panel.....	64
5.2 Stone Circles at the <i>Maqla</i> Base	70
5.3 The “Altar”.....	74
5.4 The “Altar” Conclusion	84
CHAPTER 6: THE <i>MAQLA</i> MARBLE MYSTERY	85
6.1 The Remnant Pillars.....	85
6.2 Finding Marble in Midian.....	88
6.3 The <i>Al-Bid</i> Report Quarry Description	90
6.4 Reaching the Quarry	90
6.5 The Evidence in the Quarry	93
6.6 Marble Pillar Hypotheses.....	98
6.7 The Commercial Marble Theory.....	99
6.8 Petra Marble.....	100
6.9 <i>Maqla</i> vs Petra Marble.....	101
6.10 The Marble Edifice Theory.....	102
6.11 The <i>Why</i> of the Edifice	104
6.12 The <i>Maqla</i> Marble Mystery Concluded.....	108
CHAPTER 7: THE BURNT MOUNTAIN THEORY	109
7.1 The Burnt Mountain Idea vs. Chemistry.....	111
7.2 Metamorphic Granite	112
7.3 Desert Varnish	114
7.4 “Burnt Mountain” Conclusion	115

CHAPTER 8: GEOLOGY OF THE <i>JABAL AL-LAWZ</i> REGION.....	117
8.1 Introduction to the Rock Types.....	116
8.2 The Amazing Geological History of Midian	121
8.3 Geology Overview of the <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> Area	125
8.4 Light-Colored Rocks of the Eastern <i>Lawz</i> Range.....	128
8.5 Light-Colored Rocks of the Western <i>Lawz</i> Range.....	130
8.6 The Dark Rock at <i>Jabal al-Maqila</i>	133
8.7 Conclusion	139
CHAPTER 9: THEOPHANY AT MOUNT SINAI	141
9.1 Identifying Theophanies	141
9.2 Contra Geological Change.....	142
9.3 Theophany Conclusion	146
CHAPTER 10: CLOSING THOUGHTS	147
REFERENCES	150
INDEX.....	159

LIST OF FIGURES

1.1. Moses on Mount Sinai	1
1.2. Midian and <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> in the NW Arabian Peninsula	2
1.3. The <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> Range	3
2.1. Map of the Midian Region	8
2.2. Midian in the Eastern Sinai Peninsula ca 1867	9
2.3 The Mountain Ranges in Northwest Arabia	11
2.4. Sandstone Formations in the Hisma Region.....	12
2.5. Schematic Cross-Section of the Midian Topography.....	15
2.6. The <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> Range Viewed from the Southeast	15
2.7. The <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> Range Viewed from the NE.....	16
2.8. The “Radar” Peak Installation.....	16
2.9. The Name of <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> ca 1765.....	17
2.10. <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> as “Jibbel Tybut Issum” ca 1832	18
2.11. The “Crossroads” at <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	19
2.12. The Base of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Viewed from the SE	21
2.12. Activity at the Base of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	22
2.13. Hydrology at the Base of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	23
2.14. The Ravine of the Eastern <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	24
2.15. A View from the Heights of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	25
2.16. The Upper Ravine of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	26
2.17. The “Headwaters” of the <i>Wadi al-Abyad</i>	27
2.18. Ancient Travel Routes in the Midian Region.....	28
2.19. Foliage in the <i>Wadi Rayt</i>	32
2.20. The <i>Arfaj</i> Plant	33
3.1. A Renaissance-era Version of Ptolemy’s <i>Asia IV</i> Map.....	37
3.2. Sanson’s 1654 map of Arabia.....	38
4.1. A Typical Small Burial Cairn.....	42
4.2. Results of the 1984 Epigraphic Survey	44
4.3. Archaeology Sites in the <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i> Range.....	45
4.4. The “Cemetery” Site.....	46
4.5. The Gate at the Northeast Corner of the “Cemetery”	47
4.6. Cairns in the “Cemetery”	48
4.7. “Cemetery” Boulder Accumulations	48
4.8. A Large “Standing Stone”	49
4.9. A Field of Standing Stones.....	50
4.10. The “Cemetery” Landscape.....	50
4.11. Standing Stones in the Periphery of the “Cemetery”	51
4.12. Satellite Image Analysis of the “Cemetery” Site.....	52
4.13. Unknown Fenced Site #1.....	53
4.14. The Masyoon Site.....	54
4.15. A Satellite Image of the Petroglyphs Site.....	55
4.16. The Petroglyphs Site	56
4.17. The Petroglyphs Site Viewed from the Southeast.....	56
4.18. Bovine Images in the Petroglyph Fence	57
4.19. David Fasold’s Map to <i>Jabal al-Lawz</i>	58

4.20. Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyph Picturing Cattle.....	59
5.1. The North End of the <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Fence.....	63
5.2. Rock Art at the Base of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	64
5.3. Bovine Rock Art Styles in Northwest Arabia	66
5.4. The Bovine-Human Petroglyph.....	68
5.5. The Goddess <i>Nut</i> Depicted as the “Celestial Cow”	68
5.6. Projected Stone Column Locations	71
5.7. The Proposed Structure of the Below-Ground Stone Circles.....	72
5.8. Satellite Image of the “Altar”	74
5.9. A Schematic of the “Altar” Structure.....	75
5.10. The “Altar” Prior to Excavation	76
5.11. Side View of the “Altar” Chutes	77
5.12. The “Altar” Viewed from the West.....	77
5.13. Side View of the “Altar” Chutes after Excavation	78
5.14. Northern View of the “Altar”	79
5.15. The “Altar” Structure Viewed from the West.....	80
5.16. The Stratigraphy of Section 2.....	82
5.17. The Excavation Cross Section of the Altar “Chutes”	82
6.1. Marble Remnants at the Base of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> ca 1994	86
6.2. A Damaged Marble Pillar in the Quarry	86
6.3. An Unfinished Pillar in the Quarry	87
6.4. The Anomalous White Areas on <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	89
6.5. The Spectral Plot for White Marble	89
6.6. The Marble Deposits at <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	91
6.7. The Quarry at <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	92
6.8. The West End of the Quarry.....	92
6.9. The Marble Quarry.....	93
6.10. The Trenching Technique in the Quarry	94
6.11. The Simultaneous Use of Trenching and Wedge Pockets.....	94
6.13. Uniform Furrows on the Worked Marble.....	96
6.14. Furrows Left by a Claw Chisel.....	97
6.15. An Iron Claw Chisel Design.....	97
6.16. Diagonal and Vertical Claw Chisel Furrows.....	98
6.17. The X-Ray Wavelength Pattern of a <i>Maqla</i> Marble Specimen.....	102
6.18. The Electron Micro Probe Analyzer.....	102
6.19. The Texas A&M Geology Department EMPA Lab.....	103
6.20. The Ruins and Floor Plan of the <i>Rawwafah</i> Temple.....	106
7.1. The Dark Peak of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> viewed from the East.....	109
7.2. Granite from <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	111
7.3. A Granite Gneiss Boulder	113
7.4. Granite Gneiss from the Upper <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	113
7.5. An Example of Desert Varnish.....	114
7.6. Dikes on the <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Peaks.....	116
8.1. Convergence of Rock Types on <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	117
8.2. The Primary Rock Types on Upper <i>Jabal-al-Maqla</i>	118
8.3. <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Basalt Showing Iron Oxide Deposits.....	119
8.4. The Barrovian Metamorphism Model.....	120
8.5. The Ancient Supercontinent of Gondwana	121
8.6. Future Midian Covered by the Sea ca 510 Mya.....	122
8.7. The Terranes of the Arabian-Nubian Shield (ANS).....	123
8.8. A Diagram of the Island-Arc Process.....	124

8.9. Geological Map of the <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Area.....	127
8.10. The Distribution of Dark Rock in the <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i> Region.....	128
8.11. Granite with a <i>Jadeite</i> Veneer	129
8.12. Hornblende Monzonite from the “Split Rock” Area	131
8.13. The “Split Rock” Hoodoo Viewed from the Southwest.....	131
8.14. The “Split Rock” on the Geological Map.....	132
8.15. Exfoliation Weathering on the “Split Rock” Hoodoo	133
8.16. “Greenstone” (Metamorphic Basalt) from <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	134
8.17. Diabase from <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	135
8.18. Basalt from upper <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	136
8.19. The Reverse Side of the Figure 8.16 Basalt	137
8.20. A Unique Basalt Sample from <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	138
8.21. The Basalt of Figure 8.20 under Magnification	138
8.22. Typical Basalt from <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	139
8.23. The Rock on the Peak of <i>Jabal al-Maqla</i>	140

LIST OF TABLES

6.1. Elemental Comparison of the <i>Maqla</i> Marble to the White Petra Marbles	101
---	-----

FORWARD

Having had the opportunity to visit areas of Midian and *Jabal al-Lawz*, and to study the region's geography in detail, I am sensitive to the various Exodus claims made about this region. It does not require much internet searching to find problematic notions and arguments, both pro and con, concerning Exodus activity in northwest Arabia. Over the last two decades, passionate rhetoric, some with an ad hominem flavor, has been launched by anti-*Jabal al-Lawz* partisans against those who have made various biblical claims about *Jabal al-Lawz*.

In reality, incomplete and second-hand knowledge of the area, seasoned by excitement, have tended to produce a miasma of fact and fiction, rather than substantiated conclusions. The obvious solution is to provide more factual information about the Midian region and *Jabal al-Lawz*. This work attempts to be an intermediate step in that direction, albeit in the course of a longer journey.

The enigmas of the Exodus unexpectedly overtook my thoughts during my first trip to the Near East in 1996. During my subsequent graduate studies in geography, I observed that analysis of the Exodus route was often mishandled in the Exodus literature by the application of non-geographical methodologies to a geographical problem.

Historically, Exodus commentary has been dominated by a handful of Egyptologists and archaeologists, who have pecked here and there, without strict regard for a rigorous biblical geography framework. Complicating matters, the biblical chronology, which differs greatly from the piecemeal history fabricated for Egypt, has been disregarded. The prime example is the focus



The Author in Saudi Arabia (photo by Aaron Sen)

on Rameses II, a very late pharaoh, as the oppressor in the Exodus. This chronology issue has recently been meticulously addressed in the documentary movie, *Patterns of Evidence: The Exodus* (Mahoney 2014).

Considering the entirety of Exodus geography, the location of the sea that parted for the Hebrews sets the framework for deciphering much of the Exodus route. My past research on this issue led to the publication of a doctoral dissertation and two book editions entitled, *The Lost Sea of the Exodus: A Modern Geographical Analysis*. These works identified *Yam Suph*, the ancient Hebrew name for this sea, solely as the Gulf of Aqaba.

If correct, this geographical insight greatly increases the likelihood that Mount Sinai is to be found on the far shore of this gulf, in some association with ancient *Midian* in northwest Saudi Arabia. However, this appraisal is not entirely new as the realization that *Yam Suph* was the Gulf of Aqaba can be traced back nearly two centuries to Charles Beke (1834, 180-181), who subsequently visited parts of *Midian* in 1874 (Beke 1878). Other commentators, ancient and modern, have also surmised some connection between *Midian* and Mount Sinai. But this venue has been infrequently visited and poorly studied, meaning that there are many details awaiting explanation. This work addresses some of the particulars.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, he reminded him that the true servant is patient, kind, and apt to teach, not quarrel (1 Tim. 2:24). With this thought in mind, I feel a certain duty to utilize my experiences and the data at hand to advance reasoned discourse. Specifically, to address the geographical, archaeological, and geological arguments that have been used for situating Mount Sinai in the *Jabal al-Lawz* range of northwest Saudi Arabia.

Glen A. Fritz
San Antonio, Texas
July 2016

PREFACE

In the last two decades, there has been a growing fascination with the *Jabal al-Lawz* region as a possible location for Mount Sinai and an increased appetite for information about its environs. What are the underlying reasons for this interest?

Jabal al-Lawz, the highest mountain in the range of the same name, lies in northwest Saudi Arabia, just northeast of the classical domain of ancient *Midian*. According to the Bible, Moses spent 40 years in exile in Midian. Within this range, a lesser peak, *Jabal al-Maqla*, has received publicity as a likely place for Mount Sinai. To orient the reader, satisfy curiosity, and establish a more factual framework, this work presents the geography, archaeology, and geology of this mountain and its region.

The topics that have generated more intense curiosity pertain to the archaeology and geology of *Jabal al-Maqla*. The sketchy accounts of archaeological finds have produced more questions than answers, particularly in regard to some sensational conclusions extrapolated from the biblical scenario at Mount Sinai. Yes, there is evidence of thousands of years of human activity in the vicinity of *Jabal al-Lawz*, but does any of it pertain to the eleven months the Hebrews spent at Mount Sinai in the Exodus? This circumstance begs for a review of the archaeological history and discoveries in the *Jabal al-Lawz* region.

Geology questions arise because *Jabal al-Maqla*'s upper reaches exhibit a stratum of dark rock that starkly contrasts with the mountain's pink granite. Some visitors to the mountain, and some commentators who have not visited, have speculated that this dark veneer was the result of intense, supernatural heat from the presence of the Lord seemingly described in the book of Exodus. In some quarters, this finding has been touted as "evidence" that *Jabal al-Maqla* was Mount Sinai. Conversely, some critics have seized upon this geological claim to mount a blanket rebuttal of the historical and geographical arguments for a Mount Sinai in the northwest Arabian Peninsula.

This work refers to this proposition as the "Burnt Mountain Theory," based on its tenet that the dark rock resulted from burning, charring, or scorching of the mountain's granite. The sensational nature of this idea has understandably garnered attention and attracted a following. But the prominence of this notion has also been aided by a relative paucity of hard data, which has limited well-informed critique, both pro and con.

Having studied the geology and geography of the region, visited *Jabal al-Maqla*, and collected rock samples from its slopes, I realized that I was in a unique position to comment on this topic. Hence, this project was initially birthed as a modest article explaining the geology and the biblical events pertinent to the "Burnt Mountain Theory."

However, it occurred to me that little has been written about why someone like Moses would visit the *Jabal al-Lawz* mountain range in antiquity, and how would it be reached from his Midian environs. If this range hosted Mount Sinai, what travel routes would have been suitable for the Hebrew multitudes? Such considerations require the inclusion of some geographical background and analysis.

For those readers who want detailed answers to these questions, this work offers a comprehensive exposition of the relevant geography, geology, and archaeology. In the process, the basis for the interest in *Jabal al-Maqla* as a potential site for Mount Sinai becomes clearly evident.



Figure 1.1. Moses on Mount Sinai. Jean Leon Gerome, 1895-1900.

CHAPTER 1: THE ROOTS OF THE INTRIGUE

1.1 Midian

What explains the intense interest in northwest Arabia as a location for Mount Sinai? Although the identity of Mount Sinai has long been a topic of curiosity and debate, the idea that it was situated outside of the Sinai Peninsula was not considered until the nineteenth century.

The record of this mountain starts with the Bible, which explains that Moses visited the Mountain of God (Mount Sinai) in conjunction with his forty-year exile in *Midian*. “Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the back of the wilderness, and came to the mountain of God, unto Horeb” (Exod. 3:1 ASV).

The key geographical clue given in this verse is *Midian*. Based on ancient and modern data, it was located on the southeast coast of the Gulf of Aqaba and northeast of the head of the Red Sea (**Figure 1.2**). The main Greco-Roman-era geographic references to *Midian* were made by Ptolemy (1932, 6.VII, 139) and the 1st-century AD Jewish historian, Josephus (1960, *Ant.* II.xi.1). Their comments are historically significant because they were made half a millennium before *Midian* (*Madyan*) was mentioned by the *Qur’an* or the Medieval Arab historians (e.g., Wohaibi 1973).

Prior to the 19th century, the discussion of *Midian*, and its potential connection with Mount Sinai, was limited by geographical ignorance of the entire region; the Gulf of Aqaba and northwest Arabia being *terra incognita*. The Western acquaintance with this district began with the first visit by a European traveler, Eduard Ruppell, ca 1822 (1829, 248), and with the first formal charting of the Gulf of Aqaba, completed in 1832 by Moresby (1836).

Interest in *Midian* was boosted by the reports of travelers like Charles Beke ca 1874 (Beke 1878), Richard Burton ca 1877-8 (Burton 1979; 1984), Alois Musil ca 1910 (Musil 1926), and H. St. John Philby ca 1951 and 1953 (Philby 1957). The curiosity even spilled into popular culture as seen in the 1911 Arthur Conan Doyle (2008) short story, “The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax.” In this tale, Dr. Schlessinger, a missionary from South America, is depicted as working on a monograph and map of the Holy Land with “special reference to the kingdom of the Midianites.”

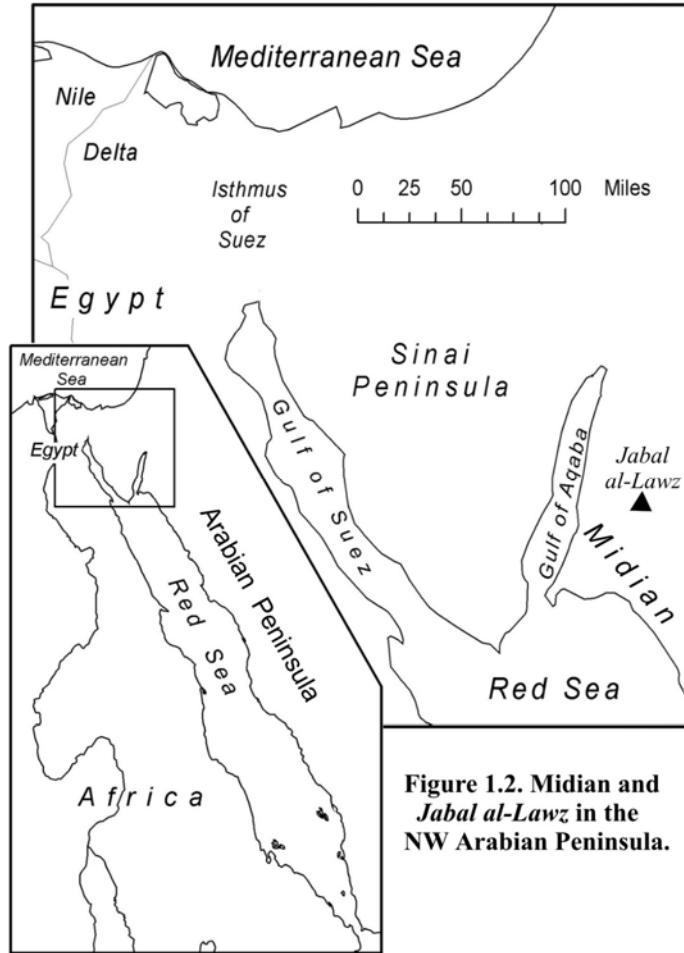


Figure 1.2. Midian and Jabal al-Lawz in the NW Arabian Peninsula.

1.2 A Mount Sinai Location

Although Mount Sinai had been traditionally associated with the Sinai Peninsula since the third or fourth centuries AD, modern geographical scrutiny of this area, and of this idea, did not begin until the mid-19th century. A century later, archaeologists began to investigate the Peninsula after Israel gained control in the 1967 Six-Day War. A number of Israeli scholars, such as Rothenberg (1970) and Beit-Arieh (1984), were subsequently able to complete some comprehensive surveys of the region. However, to the dismay of students of the Exodus, the results showed no evidence of Exodus-related activity. Itzhaq Beit-Arieh (1984, 52) concluded that--

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. So the enigma—and the challenge—remain.

This circumstance added uncertainty to the longstanding Mount Sinai traditions, which contributed to an increased interest in the *Midian* locale.

In the last three decades, attention has been directed toward *Jabal al-Lawz* range (**Figure 1.3**) in northwest Saudi Arabia as the potential site of Mount Sinai. However, this proposition has become rather controversial; perhaps unnecessarily so, from the offhanded use of anecdotal “archaeological evidence” to support the idea. Some commentators that favor a Sinai Peninsula location for Mount Sinai have seized upon this “evidence,” as well as the purveyors of it, in order

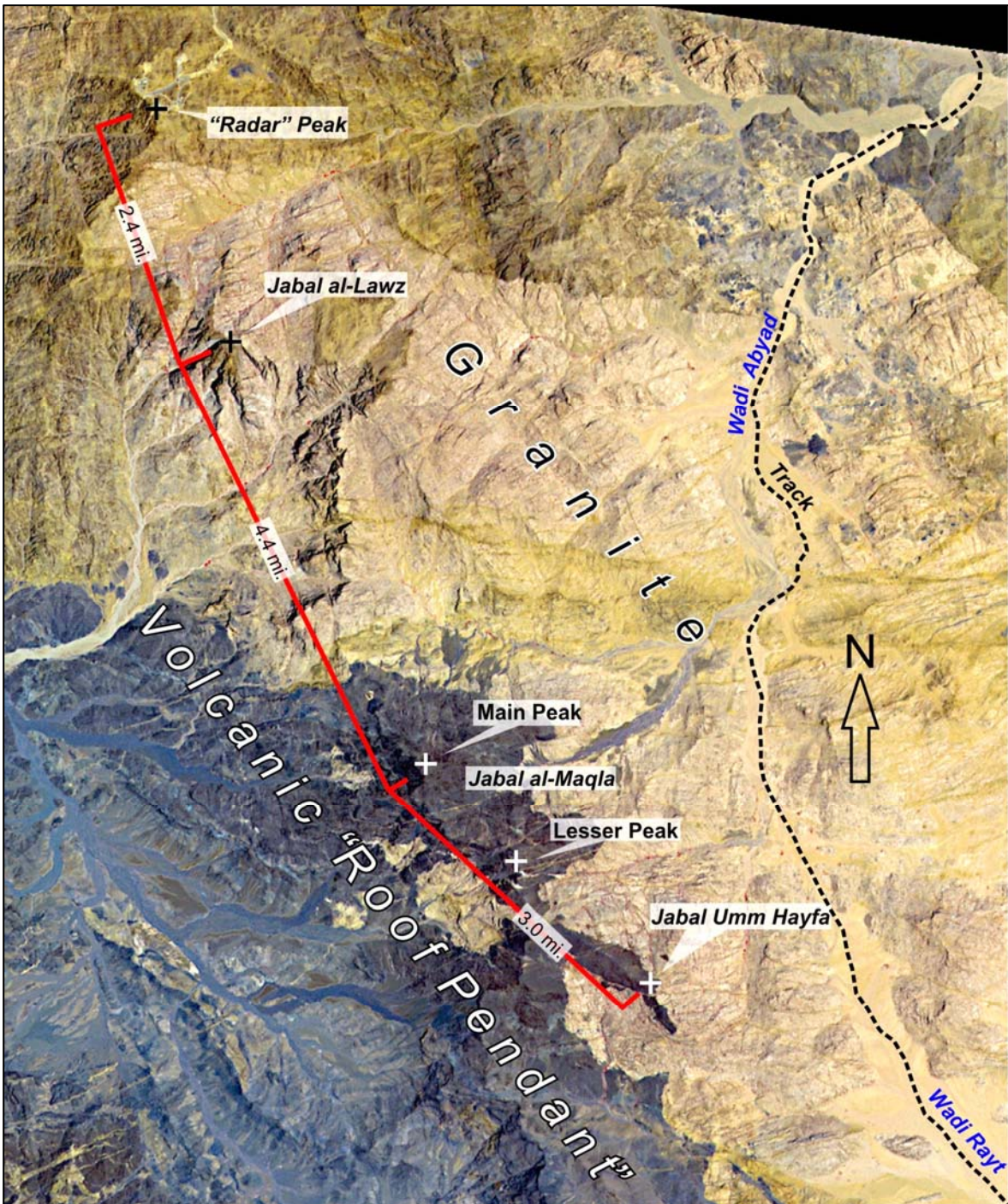


Figure 1.3. The Jabal al-Lawz Range. The peaks with known names are labeled. *Jabal-al-Maqla* has been cited as a possible place for Mount Sinai. The access to this area is via the *Wadi al-Abyad* and *Wadi Rayt* shown along the eastern foot of the range (derived from ASTER imagery from the TERRA satellite).

to disparage the entire proposition (e.g. Franz 2000; 2001; 2007; Harding 2016; Hoffmeier 2005; Sparks 2001; Wood 2006).

However, despite the critical uproar about “archaeology evidence,” the Exodus route and the location of Mount Sinai are primarily geographical problems, not archaeological problems. And, there are several sound geographical reasons *not* to nonchalantly reject the *Jabal al-Lawz* district as a potential Mount Sinai site:

- 1) It is near ancient *Midian* (cf. Exod. 2:15-3:1; Josephus *Ant.* II.xi.1, xii.1).
- 2) It is the highest peak in the region (Josephus *Ant.* II.xii.1; III.v.1).
- 3) Its topography is accessible and suitable for hosting a multitude.
- 4) Its distance from Egypt tallies with the two months (Exod. 19:1) required to reach it.
- 5) It is east of the Gulf of Aqaba, the Hebrew *Yam Suph* and Exodus sea (Fritz 2016).

1.3 Recent History of *Jabal al-Maqla*

However, referring to *Jabal al-Lawz* as the proposed Mount Sinai location is a misleading over-generalization. It is actually *Jabal al-Maqla*, within the *Lawz* range, that exhibits the archaeological remains and topographical suitability advertised as being relevant to the Exodus. As shown in **Figure 1.3**, this “mountain” has two peaks, with its tallest peak being situated 7 km (4.4 mi.) south-southeast of the *Jabal al-Lawz* peak.

Interest in *Jabal al-Maqla* as a candidate for Mount Sinai can be traced to the 1984 and 1985 visits by the self-styled explorer Ron Wyatt. On January 24, 1984, Wyatt and his two sons, Ronny and Danny, illegally entered Saudi Arabia from Jordan in an attempt to reach this mountain. They were caught when trying to leave the kingdom and were incarcerated for 78 days. Upon their return to Nashville on April 17, 1984, they appeared on national television in a CBS Morning News interview in which Wyatt was able to explain his Mount Sinai theories.

On March 31, 1985, Wyatt returned legally under the patronage of a local Saudi, accompanied by marine salvage engineer David Fasold. In collaboration with his Saudi patron, they started some minor excavations at the foot of *Jabal al-Maqla* before being detained by local authorities (Fasold 1993b). After several days of “house arrest,” the two were released, but not before surrendering their photographic film and video tape. Fasold recalled being informed that “all photographs were to remain with them, including video and notes. I was to forget I had come to Arabia, and forbidden to return or publish my findings” (Williams 1990a, 11).

Accounts of the mountain were published by Wyatt (1993), Wyatt Archaeological Research (1994a, 1994b, and 1997), and his wife, Mary Nell Wyatt (1995). David Fasold published his ruminations in his *Ark-Update* newsletter (1993a and 1993b). The time gap between Wyatt’s visit to the mountain and his publication of it is likely explained by his lack of photographs. That situation changed when Saudi expat residents Jim and Penny Caldwell began to visit the region in 1992 and loaned him some of their images.

The notoriety of the area was advanced by the exploits of Bob Cornuke and Larry Williams, who visited *Jabal al-Lawz* in back-to-back trips in June 1988. Their itinerary planning and route to the mountain was based on Wyatt and Fasold’s information, which was supplied via Astronaut James Irwin (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000, 218-9; Williams 1990, 25). In 1990, Williams released two books (1990a, 1990b) giving his account of their travels, including a few, poor quality, black and white photographs. David Fasold wrote the forward in Williams’ first book (1990a) and later used several of Williams’ photos in his 1993 newsletter review of his Saudi trip.

The most popular account of the experiences of Cornuke and Williams was Howard Blum’s 1998 book, *The Gold of Exodus*. Written as an adventure novel, the story melded their two trips into a single escapade. It also explained how they were able to falsely obtain visas for their first entry. Cornuke later released two books, *The Mountain of God* (Cornuke and Halbrook 2000) and *Relic Quest* (Cornuke 2005). Also, limited-circulation videos such as *Mountain of Fire: The Discovery of the Real Mount Sinai* (Allumination 2005) featured the travels and Exodus theories of Cornuke and Williams.

1.4 The Saudi Arabian Side of the Story

Unfortunately, the controversial means used by these travelers to gain entry into Saudi Arabia, and the provocative religious ramifications of their claims, created some indignation among Saudi authorities. As an apparent consequence of the Wyatt visit, the Saudis sent “a team of senior archaeologists” to investigate *Jabal al-Lawz* and the surrounding region in 1985 (Ansary et al.