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DESERT PLACE-NAMES IN NUMBERS 33:34, ASSURBANIPAL'S ARABIAN WARS AND THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE BIBLICAL WILDERNESS TOPONYMY

ABSTRACT

Among the geographical narratives of the book of Numbers stand two toponym descriptions that include place-names in the Sinai Peninsula and the Negev Desert: Num 33:5-49, an account of the itinerary of the Exodus with new toponym material; and Num 34:1-12, a description of the borders of the land of Canaan as told by Yahweh. Both texts have been largely regarded as having very different historical value. While Num 34:1-12 is traditionally viewed as a good source of information for the historical geography of Palestine, Num 33:5-49 is often seen as a toponym description composed for purely theological or ritual reasons, with little primary historical information. This short article will attempt a hermeneutical exercise by studying two southern toponyms from both lists and test out their historical reliability in the light of a 7th century BCE Akkadian source, Rassam Cylinder (Prism A), the most important of Neo-Assyrian king Assurbanipal's descriptions of his wars against the Arabs in the Syro-Arabian Desert. The analysis of this inscription suggests, for the first time, plausible parallels in two Aramized/Arabianized southern Transjordanian place-names for two toponyms in Numbers (Haradah in 33:24, and Hazar Addar in 34:4), strongly suggesting that the origin of these biblical site-names fits well into a specific historical-geographical setting: the arid margins of the southern Levant during the time of the Neo-Assyrian hegemony over the area. The historicity of both geographical descriptions in Numbers, then, should be re-considered in the light of this new interpretation.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Even on a casual reading, the book of Numbers reveals a clear absence of unity and heterogeneity in its different parts.[1] Among its geographical narratives stand two toponym descriptions that include place-names in the Sinai Peninsula and the Negev Desert. One of them is, in fact, a journey route: Num 33:5-49 presents an account of the itinerary followed by the

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1   As Martin Noth wrote long ago, "[f]rom the point of view of its content, the book lacks unity, and it is difficult to see any pattern of construction" (1968:1).

Israelites on their way from Egypt to southern Canaan, adding place-names not previously mentioned in the narrative of Exodus and Numbers. The other, Num 34:1-12, contains a delineation of the borders of the land that Yahweh will allot to Israel, containing site-names in the northern, eastern and southern limits of the land of Canaan. The purpose of this article is not to make a thorough study of both texts, for which there are excellent detailed analyses (see below). Instead, I wish to concentrate on one important – even if commonly overlooked – aspect of the traditional interpretations of both narratives: despite being sequentially located in the book of Numbers and partly covering the same geographical area, both texts have been largely regarded as having very different historical value. While Num 34:1-12 is traditionally viewed as a good source of information for the historical geography of Palestine, with place-names purportedly taken from ancient, primary historical sources, albeit probably originating in a period much later than the events that it claims to relate; Num 33:5-49 is often seen as a toponym description written for purely theological or ritual reasons, with little – some even daring to say "fictitious" – genuine historical information.

Are both texts really so dissimilar in historicity? Do the toponyms present in Num 34:1-12 reflect the realities of (Late Bronze or Iron Age) Canaan, filtered as they are by successive layers of copying and edition, while those in Num 33:5-49 are just the product of authors looking to draw moral and theological lessons from invented toponym etymologies? In order to answer these questions, this article will attempt a hermeneutical exercise by studying two southern toponyms from both lists and test out their historical reliability in the light of linguistic, historical and geographical data. These two southern toponyms, Haradah from the wilderness itinerary (Num 33:24) and Hazar Addar from the description of the boundaries of Canaan (Num 34:4), are in fact located by the biblical authors in a similar geographical location: the arid lands around the area of biblical Kadesh Barnea, in the modern border between the Sinai and Negev. So *a priori*, nothing indicates which toponym is more reliable. I will analyze these southern toponyms in the light of a primary Akkadian source: the Rassam Cylinder (Prism A), one of Neo-Assyrian king Assurbanipal's descriptions of his wars against the Arabs in the Syro-Arabian Desert, aided by recourse to numerous parallels in the West Semitic epigraphy. The choice of these two toponyms is not accidental, of course: I have selected them not only because they appear together in this inscription, but also because this is the first time that plausible linguistic and etymological

parallelisms between these biblical and Assyrian toponyms are suggested. The Rassam Cylinder, though exhibiting a wealth of geographical data on 7th century BCE Transjordan, has been insufficiently exploited for the elucidation of the historical toponymy of the arid fringes of the southern Levant, for which the analysis of biblical and Egyptian sources has always taken precedence. Our review of the Rassam Cylinder will demonstrate the merits of the study of the Neo-Assyrian inscriptions for the historical geography of the Iron Age Negev and Sinai.

2.   *SOUTHERN TOPONYMS IN NUMBERS 33:5-49; 34:1-12*

The description of the boundaries of the land, as described by Yahweh's words in Num 34:1-12, includes place-names all along the limits of Canaan, but for our purposes we will concentrate on the southern frontier. The border starts in the southern tip of the Salt Sea (Dead Sea) in the east, then turning in south-western direction towards the descent of Akrabim and Zin, reaching Kadesh Barnea, Hazar Addar, Azmon, the Brook of Egypt, and ending in the (Mediterranean) Sea in its western side.[2] As noted by several scholars, this description is similar to other biblical boundary reports, particularly Josh 15:2-4 (and, secondarily, Ezek 47:15-20; 48:1,28); the only major discrepancy in the southern border is the inclusion of other place-names after Kadesh Barnea, now including Hezron, Addar, Karka, and Azmon. Most importantly, critical scholarship agree that the text draws heavily from ancient sources and reveals to some degree the historical realities of ancient Canaan, while differing on which precise period of time its human geography reflects (whether Late Bronze Canaan, David's, Solomon's or Josiah's kingdoms, or pharaoh Necho's Asiatic empire[3]). For Aharoni, who supported a Late Bronze Age dating of this list, "[t]his is one of the most instructive examples of ancient sources being preserved among the geographical texts of the Bible" (1979:75). This view persists in more recent scholarship. Levin concluded that, even if the "Boundaries of the Land" description reflects the ideology of their "Priestly" writers, "[t]hey are not entirely, however, a work of fiction…the borders' very irregularity precludes their being based on an 'idealized' and 'schematic' conception of the Land" (2006:75-76).

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2   The main literature on Num 34:2-12 and related boundary descriptions includes Simons (1959:135-141); Noth (1968:248-251); Aharoni (1979:69-72); Hutchens (1993); Kallai (1997:70-72); Levin (2006). See also Grosby (2007:99-112).

3   See Levin (2006:61-63).

Opinions regarding the wilderness route of Num 33:5-49 are more varied. The historical geography of the route followed by the Israelites during the Exodus has always fascinated scholars, but the topic is rife with disagreements about the text's original sources, time of composition, and site locations.[4] Num 33:5-49 presents a summary of the stations of the Israelites on their way to Canaan; its importance lies in that it contains toponyms (beginning in Dophkah, Num 33:12b, and covering places in the northeastern Sinai) not included in the preceding narrative of Exodus and Numbers. Many scholars see in this list, generally attributed to the Priestly version, the most likely source of other wilderness stories found in Exodus and Numbers, thus potentially being a goldmine of historical and geographical information (Davies 1983; Milgrom 1990:xxi; Smith 1997). Thus for Noth, "what we are dealing here is not a series of more or less haphazard, isolated additions, but a coherent list of place-names which must surely represent an 'itinerary'" (1968:243). In his key study on the wilderness toponyms, Davies concluded that "it should be assumed that the itineraries do describe routes", which he attributes to a Deuteronomistic redactor (1979:59-60). Davies has particularly made the case of Num 33:5-49 as originally being an administrative document; it would belong to the genre of itineraries, well attested in the ancient Near East, and would have its closest parallels in the military campaigns recorded by the Assyrian royal annals of the 9th century BCE (Davies 1974:78-81). Others, on the contrary, view this list as a late by-product of the Exodus and Numbers narratives, with little direct historical information (Van Seters 1994:153-164; Roskop 2011). Van Seters, among others, is very cautious, stating that "this particular text is a fictitious document, said to be a journalistic record kept by Moses of the wilderness journey in order to give a certain verisimilitude to the desert wanderings" (1994:162; similarly, Zorn, J R, "Dophkah", *ABD* 2:222-223). Nathanson's view is even more pessimistic, in that "[t]he mentioned locations must be treated as fictional literary toponyms; many are descriptive of the events that shaped the narrative itself" (2014:208).

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4   The bibliography on the wilderness itineraries is immense; for useful modern studies see: Simons (1959:234-259); Davies (1979; 1990); Milgrom (1990:284-287); Redford (1992:408-422); Sarna (1996:103ff); Kitchen (2003:265-312); Oblatt (2004); Hoffmeier (1997:176-198; 2005:159-171; 2014:80-85); Roskop (2011); Finkelstein (2015). See also Nathanson (2014:206-211).

2.1   Haradah (Num 33:24)

Although several well-known geographical areas are mentioned in Num 33:5-49 – especially in its eastern flank, such as the lands of Edom and Moab, probably the region best known by the writers – identification is uncertain or doubtful for most of the place-names. One of the locations that the writers thought worthwhile mentioning is Haradah (חרדה, Num 33:24, LXX Χαραδαθ), a station listed between Mount Shepher and Makheloth. The location of Haradah suggests it was located somewhere in the northeastern portion of the Sinai Peninsula between Mount Sinai and Kadesh Barnea, since Hashmonah (a variant reading of Azmon [Josh 15:4]?[5]), Ezion Geber (certainly in or close to the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, probably Tell el-Kheleifeh), Kadesh Barnea (probably ʿAin el-Qudeirat in the northeastern Sinai) and the land of Edom are mentioned well after it (Num 33:35-37). But nothing more can be determined from the context.

Some lexicons and commentaries list Haradah as an "unknown" site (e.g. BDB 2732 [חֲרָדָה II]). Studies on the historical geography of the Exodus locate it in places in the border between the Sinai and the Negev, such as Jebel ʾAradeh (Palmer 1871:314-315; see Davies 1974:79-83; Zorn, "Haradah", *ABD* 3:57) and Naqb el-ʿArūd next to the Wâdī Lussan (Nahal Loz) (*GP*, 215). A Sinai location is not supported by everyone, however. Koenig (1964) put forward the hypothesis that most of the names in this itinerary should be located east of the Gulf of Aqaba, in modern northwestern Saudi Arabia.[6] Specifically, he identified Haradah with al-Ḥaradah (Koenig 1964:129),[7] a location 85 km south of Aqaba already mentioned by Alois Musil in his Hejazi travels (but not located in his map; Musil 1926:101).[8]

Regardless the exact geographical location of this site, it seems the word Haradah was a familiar place-name in the southern Levant and northern Arabia, so we should turn our attention to its etymology. Two main etymologies can be proposed for this word. As is well known, the primary

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5   As proposed by Simons (1959:255-256).

6   Koenig followed previous suggestions made by Noth (1940) of a North Arabian setting of the Exodus route.

7   *HALOT* (I:351 [II חֲרָדָה]) and *DCH* (III:313 [חֲרָדָה V]) follow this identification.

8   This al-Ḥaradah is today most likely the point of a bridge in the Hejaz railway to Mecca, between the Bir Hermas and al-Hazm stations. See the UNESCO description of the Hejaz Railway: http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6026/.

meaning in Hebrew is "trembling", "fear", "anxiety", "anger", from the root-verb חרד, "tremble", "quake" (BDB 2729 [חָרַד]; *HALOT* I:350 [חרד]; *TDOT* V:166-170; *DCH* III:311-312 [חרד I; חרד II]). Not surprisingly, some have argued that some unknown incidents of "anxiety" that unfolded in Haradah gave the name to the site (Nathanson 2014:208).[9] This does not mean that the primary meaning of חרד could not be used as etiology for place-names; for example, the well-known case of the spring of Harod near Mt. Gilboa, where Gideon tested his men before the battle against the Midianites, letting go home those who "trembled" (חָרֵד) (Judg 7:1-3; cf. 2 Sam 23:25; 1 Chr 11:27).[10] *TDOT* suggests a connection with Akkadian ḫaradum, "desert region(?)", and Arabic ḫārada, "have little rain" (*TDOT* V:166), but little if any evidence exists for the suggested etymology of the Akkadian term.[11] None of these proposed etymologies are totally convincing, depending as they are on uncertain etiologies arising from the reading of the biblical text or dubious parallels in other Semitic languages.

2.2   Hazar Addar (Num 34:4)

If for the second toponym in our analysis, Hazar Addar (חצר־אדר, Num 34:4), listed between Kadesh Barnea and Azmon, the etymological elucidation is easier, the interpretation of its geographic and socio-historical context is no less a mystery. The parallel description of Josh 15:3 renders two names, Hezron and Addar, while the LXX substitutes them for ἔπαυλιν Αραδ, "village of Arad". The location of Hazar Addar is not precise, but most proposals place it in the northeastern Sinai, in or close to one of the springs that dot the modern border with the Negev, especially ʿAin Qedeis (Aharoni 1979:72; Rainey & Notley 2006:35) and ʿAin el-Qudeirat (*GP*, 47, 344, 349; Simons 1959:137; Lipiński 2006:119).

    The name חצר־אדר is composed of two names, which evidently the editor of Josh 15:3 thought as two different places. Hebrew חצר is used with two principal meanings in the Bible, each one related to two well-known Proto-Semitic roots. The first one is Proto-Semitic *ḥṭr, a term referring to a

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9   A second probable meaning of חרד, "lodging" (*DCH* III:313 [חֲרָדָה III]), although attractive, is attested only once (the story of Elisha and the woman of Shunem; 2 Kgs 4:13) in a context that is not sufficiently clear.

10   See *EDB* 553 (Harod). *HALOT* (I:350-51 [חֲרֹד]) suggests interpreting this toponym as "intermittent well", alongside Arabic ḫārada, "to rain little".

11   *AHw* and *CAD* do not provide this or related meanings. *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (Black, George & Posgate 2000:107) suggests "desert place?" (ḫarādum I) but offers no parallels.

fenced area or pen that in Hebrew came to denote an enclosure or courtyard around a house. The second root is *ḥṣr, meaning "settlement", a term that the biblical text uses to indicate an unwalled site, such as a farmstead or nomadic settlement (BDB 2691 [חָצֵר I, II]; *HALOT* I:345 [III *חצר]).[12] It is probable that in the arid, semi-pastoral environment of southern Palestine, where the biblical text makes frequent references to place-names with the terms חצר and חצרים, the distinction between both meanings was irrelevant; thus, "[i]f the Hebrew *ḥāṣēr* is indeed an amalgamation of two Proto-Semitic roots, by the time Iron Age Hebrew was being spoken and written the two meanings were interchangeable" (Levin 2010:202). It was in a place called Hazeroth in the Sinai Desert where Miriam and Aaron murmured against Moses (Num 11:35; 12:16; 33:17-18; Deut 1:1). The list of places of the tribe of Judah in Josh 15 presents several toponyms with the חצר element, apparently located in the Negev area: Hazor (v. 23), Hazor Hadattah and Kerioth Hezron (v. 25), Hazar-Gaddah (v. 27), and Hazar-Shual (v. 28; Neh 11:27). The same or similar names appear in lists of Simeonite towns: Hazar Shual (Josh 19:3; 1 Chr 4:28), Hazar-Susah (Josh 19:5), and Hazar-Susim (1 Chr 4:31).

The second element, אדר, probably derives from *'iddar*, an Aramaic loan-word meaning "threshing floor"; this Aramaic term also likely influenced Akkadian *adru*, a word reflecting the same meaning. As a noun it occurs only in the late biblical Aramaic text of Dan 2:35 (*HALOT* I:16-17 [אֲדַר], V:1807 [אִדַּר]; *AHw* I:13 [*adru(m)* II]; *CAD* I:129-130 [*adru*]; Hoftijzer & Jongeling 1995:18; Tawil 2009:437). "Threshing floor" is likely the meaning of four compound place-names with the element *i̯-d-r-i̯* located in the Negev and mentioned in pharaoh Sheshonk I's triumphal relief in the Bubastite Portal at Karnak (Lipiński 2006:106-107).

In sum, although we are not certain of its exact location, the meaning of Hazar Addar, probably "enclosure of the threshing floor", fits well into the mixed economy of pastoralism and agriculture of the tribal groups that lived and moved in the Negev and Sinai during the Iron Age.

3. *ASSURBANIPAL'S ARABIAN WARS IN THE RASSAM CYLINDER (PRISM A)*[13]

The events of Assyrian king Assurbanipal's Arabian wars (*ca.* 650 BCE) are described in nine historical sources (Eph'al 1982:46-52; Knauf 1989:1-

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12   See *TDOT* (V:131-139); Faust (2009:108-109); Tawil (2009:117-118); Levin (2010:189-215), with bibliography.

13   For a previous study on this Assyrian inscription, see Tebes (2016).

2, 93-104; Retsö 2003:161-162); the Rassam Cylinder (RC), also known as Prism A, is the most important of them. This inscription devotes considerable attention to the military campaigns carried out by the Assyrians against a loose coalition of Arabian tribes settled and moving throughout the Syro-Arabian Desert and Transjordan, led by Yawtha', chief of the Qedarites, and probably divided into two main wars (the first one, before 652 BCE; the second one, 651-648 BCE). A comprehensive analysis of the RC reveals that this is one of the latest sources that were produced referring to these events, and although it provides the main line of the narrative it also distorts the historical episodes to match the scribes' needs, conflating different events into one outline.[14]

RC VII:82-124 records the Transjordanian campaign of Assurbanipal against the rebels by combining episodes of the two wars: basically, Assurbanipal marched through Syria and Transjordan, and Yawtha' was defeated and fled to Nebayot.[15] For our purposes, the most interesting part is VII:107-116, which provides several toponyms in this area:

> [107] *ina qí-bit* AN-ŠÁR *u* ^dingir^XV ERIM-ḪI-A-*ia* [108] *ina gi-ra-a* ^uru^*a-z/ṣa-ar*-DINGIR [109] ^uru^*ḫi-ra-ta-a-qa-z/ṣa-a-a ina* ^uru^*ú-du-me* [110] *ina né-reb* ^uru^*ia-ab-ru-du ina* ^uru^É-^I^ ‖ ^Ø^(K 1771)*am-ma-ni* ‖ *na* [111] *ina na-ge-e šá* ‖ *ša* ^uru^*ḫa-ú-ri-i* ‖ Ø-*na* [112] *ina* ^uru^*mu-'a-a-ba*-Ø ‖ *a?*(A17) *ina* ^uru^*sa-'a-ar-ri* [113] *ina* ^uru^*ḫa-ar-ge-e ina na-ge-e* [114] *ša* ‖ *šá* ^uru^*ṣu-bi-ti* ‖ *te di-ik-ta-šú* [115] *ma-'a-at-tu a-duk* [116] *ina la me-ni áš-kun* ‖ *áš-kuna?*(A17) BAD5- BAD5-*šú*

> [107] At the command of Assur and Ishtar, my armies (I moved) [108] in the *girâ* of Az/ṣarilu, [109] Ḫiratâqaz/ṣaya in Edom (*Udume*), [110] in the mountain pass of Iabrud, in Bît Ammani, [111] in the district of Ḫaurîna, [112] in Moab (*Mu'aba*), in Seir (*Sa'arri*), [113] in Ḫargê, in the district of [114] Zoba, his massacre, [115] abundant, I executed [116] countless times I imposed his defeat.

This text presents many problems, the most significant of which are the disagreements over the exact placement of this campaign in the overall

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14   See Weippert (1973-1974); Eph'al (1982:147-169); Gerardi (1992); Retsö (2003:166-167).

15   See the text in Streck (1916:64-66); Borger (1996:61-62). Several translations have been published: Smith (1871:256-260); Streck (1916:65-67); *ARAB* (II:313-314); Weippert (1973-1974:40-42); Borger (1996:245).

outline of Assurbanipal's Arabian wars[16] and the fact that the place-names are not arranged in geographical order – an issue not restricted to this source indeed. What is clear is that the campaign covered parts of the Syrian and Transjordanian steppes. From north to south, the inscription mentions Iabrud, Ḫaurîna, Ḫargê, and Zoba, all of them locations in Syria; and the Transjordanian lands of Ammon (Bît Ammani), Moab, Edom and Seir (here denoting the Negev?).[17] However, the toponyms Az/ṣarilu and Ḫiratâqaz/ṣaya, located in Edom, have defied any attempt to be identified.

16   Eph'al (1982:149) is of the opinion that the places mentioned in the text were military garrisons supplied by Assyrian troops that repelled the first rebellion, coupled with the aid of the king of Moab. Retsö (2003:169) on the contrary, situates this campaign in the second war.

17   The "mountain pass of Iabrud" is probably a reference to Yābrud, located in the slopes of the Syrian Anti-Lebanon mountains (Weippert 1973-1974:61-62; Eph'al 1982:149 n. 514; Parpola & Porter 2001:Map 8:B3). Ḫaurîna is traditionally associated with the province of Hauran mentioned in the inscriptions of Shalmaneser III and Tiglath-Pileser III or with Ḫawārīn in Syria (Weippert 1973-1974:62; Eph'al 1982:149 n. 514; Parpola & Porter 2001:Map 8:C2). The location of Ḫargê is unknown; the toponym has been identified as [URU]*Ar-gi-te* in Syria, a site that is mentioned in other Akkadian sources (Eph'al 1982:149 n. 514). The "district of Zoba" is traditionally identified as the Aramean kingdom of Zoba, known by the Hebrew Bible and Assyrian texts (Lipiński 2001:319-345; Parpola & Porter 2001:Map 8:B2). "Bît Ammani" is a reference to the land of Ammon, in the central region of Transjordan (Parpola & Porter 2001:Map 7:D5). Moab is the well-known Transjordanian kingdom of the same name located east of the Dead Sea (Parpola & Porter 2001:Map 7:D5). There is a reference to Edom, the land located in southern Transjordan (Parpola & Porter 2001:Map 14:C3), and to Seir. In the Hebrew Bible the names Edom and Seir appear several times in close connection and even in parallel; more often than not they are used as similar, if not identical, geographical references. This has led to a commonly held assumption, in the late Jewish tradition and in the biblical scholarship, that Seir is to be associated with the traditional territory of the kingdom of Edom, that is to say, southern Transjordan. However, the question is difficult to interpret since according to other references Seir and Edom appear to be located in the Negev, west of the Wadi Arabah (Bartlett 1969:5-7; MacDonald 2000:67-70, 185).

3.1   Ḫiratâqaz/ṣaya in Edom

RC VII:109 lists the place-name Ḫiratâqaz/ṣaya as located in Edom (ᵘʳᵘḫi-ra-ta-a-qa-z/ṣa-a-a ina ᵘʳᵘú-du-me). This is the only occurrence of this name in the Neo-Assyrian sources, and no site of that name is known from contemporary inscriptions nor from the biblical text. Due to the imprecision of the royal scribes, the use of the determinative URU tells nothing about the status of the toponym (Eph'al 1982:150 n. 514.). Although the Akkadian cuneiform probably preserves a corrupt form of the original name, which could be forever lost, it is likely that this is a compound name, Ḫiratâ-qaz/ṣaya. In 1898 Gottheil connected Ḫiratâqaz/ṣaya with Syriac ḥīrtā˒, "camp" (1898:202),[18] but his suggestion did not receive attention from other scholars. Gottheil's proposal serves as a point of departure for the analysis of two similar possible etymologies for Ḫiratâ:

1)   ḥyrt/ḥrt, meaning camp and the act of camping, attested by Sabaean ḥyr, "pitch camp", and ḥyrt/ḥrt, "camp, encampment", Syriac ḥīrtā˒, "camp", and by extension Palmyrene ḥyrt˒, "camp, citadel" (hence the Lakhmid city of Hira) and less probably Hismaic ḥirz, "fortified place" (Beeston et al. 1982:74; King 1990:387; Maraqten 1995:102; Hoftijzer & Jongeling 1995:370; Healey 2009:213). According to Shahîd's detailed study, ḥīrtā˒ is not a common word in Syriac and, in fact, has no antecedent in Old or Targumic Aramaic, nor, we should add, in other second-first millennium BCE Semitic language. He suggests that this word is of Arabian origin, as attested by the Sabaean epigraphic sources, influencing its use in the Syriac vocabulary (Shahîd 1967; 2006:491-498). This conclusion allows a late (Hellenistic/Roman period) rather than early date for its transmission.

2)   ḥrṯ/t, meaning cultivated land and the act of ploughing. At this point it is necessary to recall some phonological changes the Semitic languages underwent throughout the second and early first millennia BCE. Some languages, such as Late Bronze Canaanite, Phoenician and Hebrew, merged the phoneme *ṯ to š (Lipiński 1997:119; Garr 2004:28-30, 215, 226; Kogan 2011:96-98); so for Proto-Semitic *ḥrṯ we have cognates in Amarna Canaanite aḫ-ri-šu and Hebrew חרש (Hoftijzer & Jongeling 1995:407; Zammit 2002:136-137; Tawil

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18   For the Qos connection he was following Lenormant (1880:143), although the latter's identification with Hellenistic Zeus Caius is doubtful.

2009:121; Del Olmo Lete & Sanmartín 2015:367).[19] This merge had occurred independently in Akkadian, language that also lost several consonants, among them *ḫ, a process "which colored neighboring *a* vowels to *e* before they were lost" (Huehnergard 2005:587): thus Akkadian *erēšu* < *ḫarātu* (Lipiński 1997:144; Kogan 2011:109-110; Huehnergard 2004:17-18; 2014:449-450). Other languages, such as Ugaritic and Aramaic, retained the phoneme *ṯ* (Hoch 1994:480; Lipiński 1997:120-121; Sánchez Sabadillo 2002:36; Garr 2004:28-30, 215, 226; Kogan 2011:94-95, 100-101). Therefore we have Ugaritic *ḫrṯ*, Old Aramaic and Palmyrene *ḫrt'*, and Syriac *ḥerat*, "to plough" (Hoftijzer & Jongeling 1995:407; Del Olmo Lete & Sanmartín 2015:367). Quranic Arabic has the root *ḥarṯa*, "to plough", "to sow seed", and the noun *ḥart*, "field", "planted land" (Zammit 2002:136-137; Badawi & Haleem 2008:197; see also Wehr 1994:195); similarly Sabaean *mḫrṯt*, "ploughland", and Hismaic *ḫarata*, "perforate, bore" (Beeston *et al*. 1982:71; King 1990:393).

In sum, the evidence presented so far indicates that by the Neo-Assyrian period West Semitic *ḫrṯ/t* was a common term in the Levant and Arabia, while it was only later, probably in the Hellenistic/Roman period, when Arabian *ḫyrt/ḥrt* was transferred to Syria and northern Mesopotamia. This suggests that the toponym Ḫiratâqaz/ṣaya presents as first component West Semitic *ḫrṯ/t*: although Gottheil's suggestion does not accord to the present evidence, it does show the way to the correct etymology of the name. It is difficult to know which language is behind this name, but certainly it is not Akkadian or Hebrew; it is possible that an Aramaic or North Arabian dialect is present here. Akkadian *ḫ* presents no problem for this identification, since it is equivalent to West Semitic *ḥ* (e.g. Akk. *ḫabābu* = WSem. *ḥbb*) (*GAG* §8i; Tropper 1995; Huehnergard 2003; 2005:590; Kogan 2011:110). This is confirmed by the many Aramaic loans into Akkadian, such as *ḫallatu* < Aram. *ḥlt* (Streck 2011:419-421). Dental *ṯ* poses no problem either; when cuneiform transcribes North Arabian toponyms having *ṯ*, it does so by using *t*, such as in the case of *Ia-at-ri-bu* for *Yaṯrib* (Medina) (Lipiński 1997:121). Taking the toponym Ḫiratâqaz/ṣaya at face value, it is possible that West Semitic *ḫrṯ/t* was a common name for referring to territories or parcels of

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19   The Hebrew word, as is well known, had a wider semantic range, which included "to plough", "to engrave" and by extension "graver", "artisan" and "carving": BDB 2690 (חָרַשׁ I), 2796 (חָרָשׁ); *HALOT* I:357 (I חרשׁ), 358 (חָרָשׁ); *DCH* III:323-325 (חרשׁ Iff.); *TDOT*, 220ff.

cultivated land in the arid steppes and deserts of Iron Age Syria, Transjordan and Negev.

I suggest this is the real meaning beyond the otherwise obscure name of Exodus station חרדה, a non-Hebrew name that probably entered Number's wilderness toponymy by recording or copying toponymy/itinerary lists of the Sinai and Negev. The shift $\underline{t}/t > d$ can be attributed to variant readings of the same word, a well-known phenomenon in the rendering of foreign place-names such as חדרך (Zech 9:1) for Akkadian [iri]ha-ta-ri-qa and Aramaic Hazreq (admittedly, possibly not Semitic) (Lipiński 2001:257; Bryce 2009:296). It can also be caused by different dialectal spellings of the same word; Targumic Aramaic in fact records two different spellings for the word meaning "to incise", hrt and hrd, the earlier also meaning "to plow", the latter being related to rdy/rdy°, "plowing" (Jastrow 1903:507; Cook 2008:101; *CALP*). Interestingly, in the Targumic interpretation of the book of Exodus and Numbers appears the name Hiratha/h (חירתא/ה)[20] as the translation of the name of the fourth station of the Exodus Pi-Hahiroth (Exod 14:2,9; Num 33:7,8), which is traditionally understood as a word of Egyptian or Akkadian origin.[21] Whatever the original etymology may be, it is likely that the Targumic interpreters understood its meaning as deriving from $hr\underline{t}/t$,[22] thus corresponding well with its southern geographical location and similarity with Akkadian Ḥiratâ. Two Greek place-names in Hellenistic/Roman Negev and southern Transjordan also appear related to West Semitic $hr\underline{t}/t$. Flavius Josephus mentions an Ἄρυδδα among several places taken by Alexander Jannaeus to the Nabateans (*Ant.* 14.18), a

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20   This toponym is translated as Pum/Pumey Hiratha (פום/פומי חירתא), "mouth of Hiratha" (Tg. Onq.; Tg. Ps.J.), and *Pwndqy* Hiratha/h (פונדקוי חירתא/ה), "inn of Hiratha" (Tg. Neof.). *Pwndqy* is a loan word from Greek *pandokeîon*, "inn, tavern, lodging place"; Jastrow (1975:1143); Janse (2014:122). See also McNamara (2010:307).

21   Among the suggested Akkadian etymologies stand $her\bar{u}tu$, "digging work" (applied to ditches and canals); see Hoffmeier (1997:169-170; 2005:105-108), with bibliography. Although it would be tempting to relate Pi-Hahiroth to West Semitic $hr\underline{t}/t$, the location of this place-name in the eastern borders of Egypt and the many plausible Egyptian etymologies suggest its etymology has more to do with the Egyptian than with the Western Semitic world.

22   Other interpretations assume the Targumic commentators knew the (hypothetical) meaning of the word in Biblical Hebrew (Cook 2008:309: "canals?") or interpreted it as a post-Biblical Hebrew word (Davies 1979:20; Drazin & Wagner 2009:420; McNamara 2010:307: "licentiousness").

toponym which Abel located in Naqb el-'Arūd in the southern Negev and related to biblical Haradah (*GP*, 148, 215; cf. also Rainey & Notley 2006:333),[23] but that other scholars locate in Moab (Schalit 1951; Shatzman 1991:91). A related place-name located in southern Transjordan is Ἀριδδήλα, mentioned by the 6th century CE Beersheba Edicts (frag. V, l. 5).[24]

What about the second part of the name Ḫiratâqaz/ṣaya? Gottheil (1898:202) related -qaz/ṣaya with קציו, a Nabataean version of the name of Edomite god Qos (קוס). His suggestion was also not followed by posterior studies, but the close association of this toponym with Edom makes the suggestion worth exploring. Edomite קוס was rendered in Neo-Assyrian Akkadian as *qauš*, thus the name of Edomite king *qws-gbry* was written in Neo-Assyrian as ᵐ*qa-uš-gab-ri* (Lipiński 2014:42), showing the shift in sibilants s > š that occurred already in Middle Akkadian (Lipiński 1997:130; Hämeen-Antilla 2000:9-10; Huehnergard 2005:587). However, if the name Qos does occur in the RC, it does so with the original sibilant z/ṣ.

The origin and etymology of the name Qos are yet not well understood. The name has been traditionally associated with the Arabic term قوس ("bow"), while the relationship with the pre-Islamic weather-god Quzaḥ is possible but yet not proven (Vriezen 1965; Bartlett 1989:204-207; Dearman 1995:119-131; Knauf, E A, "Qôs", *DDD*, 674-677). Its pedigree goes back as early as New Kingdom Egypt, where some inscriptions exhibit toponyms

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23   Lipiński in turn related Ἄρυδδα and other Semitic place-names such as 'Arad, 'Arrad or 'Arrada to Akkadian *ḫarādu*, "to wake up, to be alert, to watch" (*AHw* I:322 [*ḫarādu* IV]; *CAD* VI:88 [*ḫarādu* A]), thus the hypothetical Semitic *'rd*, "watch post", used in military contexts (2006:107-109). Relatedly, similar toponyms such as Ḫarada/Ḫaradum on the Middle Euphrates and Phoenician Ἄραδος were linked to a hypothetical *ḫarad*, "narrow pass" (Lipiński 2004:137 n. 251; 2006:107 n. 55).

24   Ἀριδδήλα is often related to Latin *Arieldela*, listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum* (Or. 34.44) (Findlater 2003:89, 94-95). Other fragments of the edicts have Ἀρινδήλων and Ἀρινδ[δήλων], names similar to the Ἀρινδήλα attested by Georges of Cyprus and Hierocles (Findlater 2003:94-95). These toponyms have been identified with two south Transjordanian places having the same name: Khirbet Gharandal, a Roman fort located in the eastern Wadi Arabah; and Gharandal in the Edomite plateau, a Nabataean/Roman town located 5 km to the south-west of Busayra, the ancient Edomite capital (MacDonald 2015:57-58, 68-69, 73).

located in Palestine bearing the name Qos (Oded 1971). This material is supplemented by several references to Qos or to personal names having Qos as component found in Edom and the Negev during the Iron Age (Porter 2004:Table 1). In two open-air sanctuaries in the northern Negev, Horvat Qitmit and 'En Hazeva, purportedly Edomitizing cult activities are present as major features, probably related to the cult of Qos (Beit-Arieh 1992). That Qos was worshipped in the North Arabian-speaking arid lands of the Syro-Arabian deserts is now clear from a short North Arabian rock inscription recently discovered in the Bayir area west of the Wadi Sirhan in southern Transjordan (Hayajneh, Ababneh & al-Khyasheh 2015). The Persian and Hellenistic Periods witnessed the flowering of the cult of this deity.

The Qos etymology for qaz/ṣaya has its merits, but still has to explain the –<aya> ending. Following Gottheil, it could be possible that this is an Akkadian dialectal version of the name קציו, which admittedly is a late Nabataean form. But the long form appears as the hypocoristic form *qwsy* in a Persian Period ostracon from Tel Beersheba in the northern Negev (Bartlett 1989:205; Porter 2004:Table 1:42) and as theophoric element in at least one biblical name, that of Merarite Levite Kushaiah (קושיהו) (1 Chron 15:17), a character incidentally mixed with other people with Edomitizing names and usually identified as the Kishi (קישי) of 1 Chron 6:29 and Kish (קיש) of 2 Chron 29:12 (Bartlett 1989:201; *contra* Knauf, *DDD*, 674.).[25] Another possibility is that we are dealing with the Akkadian gentilic suffix -āya (Miller & Shipp 1996:2; Lipiński 1997:223-224),[26] but here the probability is far less certain given that gentilics were usually appended to personal names, categories of workers, names of peoples or geographic regions, but not cities or towns.[27]

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25   For the presence of Edomites in Iron Age Judah, see Tebes (2011a); Amzallag (2015).

26   Aramaic had its own gentilitial ending, -*ay* (Lipiński 1997:223-224), but it does not accord with the place-name under study. Similarly, totally unrelated is Ugaritic feminine suffix -*āyu*; cf. Van Soldt (2010).

27   There are cases of town names constructed with gentilic endings, but these have a *ša*-construction, for example the (later) Babylonian Akkadian *ālu ša* [lú]*Yāhūdāya* ("town of the Judaeans") and *ālu ša* [lú]*Arbāya* ("town of the Arabians"); see Pearce (2015:13-15). To be sure, in few cases town-names were certainly appended with gentilic endings, such as Tiglath-Pileser III's southern Palestinean toponyms [URU]*Ḫa-at-te-e-a* or [[URU]*Ḫa-at*]-*ti-a-a*, but these cases were

In conclusion, it is possible to interpret Ḫiratâqaz/ṣaya as a place-name located in Transjordan in or close to Edom, with a Semitic etymology of probable Aramaic or North Arabian origin but definitely not Akkadian or Hebrew. Its meaning is difficult to grasp, but if we could tentatively translate it as "cultivated land of Qos", it can be interpreted as a parcel of land devoted to the sustaining of the worship of the Edomite god Qos, probably adjoining a small shrine of this deity. Perfect examples of this kind of site seem to be the open-air sanctuaries of Horvat Qitmit and 'En Hazeva, located next to desert routes in the northern Negev, and a small rural shrine recently discovered in the area of Wadi at-Thamad in northern Moab (WT-13) (Dolan 2007; Daviau 2012:443-446), three cultic places visited by passing travelers, either caravan merchants or local herders (Finkelstein 1995:149-152). The archaeological evidence and the faunal assemblage found at Qitmit attest that ritual ceremonies involving sacrificial slaughters, cooking, feasting, and placing of offerings, took place in the shrine (Beit-Arieh 1995:307-308), while ceramic vessels with the admittedly broken phrases *lqws[…]* and *[…]blqwshp[…]* ("for Qos") (Porter 2004:Table 2:54, 55) are likely the remains of food offerings to Qos. Thus, the provision of rations for the worship of deities was a significant part of the desert shrines' economy, and the foodstuff could have been produced in adjoining agricultural plots or brought from more fertile lands.

3.2   *Girâ of Az/ṣarilu*

The second place-name related to Edom present in the Rassam Cylinder is the "*girâ* of Az/ṣarilu" (*gi-ra-a* ^uru*a-z/ṣa-ar*-DINGIR) (RC VII:108). The meaning and location of this place are also enigmatic.[28] *Girâ* is a *hapax legomenon* whose meaning is unknown;[29] it could tentatively be read as the accusative form of *girru* ("road", "path") (*CAD* V:90 [*girru* A]),[30] but nothing more can be said.

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probably the result of confusion between *ʼālu* ("town") and *ʼāl* ("clan") (Lipiński 2006:127).

28   No location or etymology is given in lexicons; e.g. "Asar-ilu", *RIA* 1:166.

29   For *AHw* (I:291 [*girû*]) is a "Schreibfehler". *CAD* (V:97 [*girû* B]) sees the nominative case of this noun as *girû*, but whose meaning in this context is "uncertain"; cf. Weippert (1973-1974: 41 n. 12); Ephʻal (1982:149 n. 514).

30   E.g.: *gir-ra qatna mēteqa sūqa ša zūk šēpē ṣilāniš ētiquma ana mēteq ummānija...uṭîb*, "I improved for the advance of my army the narrow path, the strait passage, through which the infantry had to pass (marching) sideways".

As with the former toponym, a case can be made of this term to be composed of two parts, Az/ṣar-ilu. The first component, az/ṣar, can be related to two Akkadian terms. The first one is *esēru*, with variant readings *eṣēru* and *ezēru*, "to enclose", "to channel water", "to take captive" (*AHw* I:249 [*esēru(m)* II]; *CAD* IV:334-335 [*esēru* B]), therefore *asīru*, "prisoner of war", and *bīt asīrī*, "prisoner compound" (*AHw* I:249 [*esēru(m)* I]; *CAD* II:331-332 [*asīru* A; *asīru* A in *bīt asīrī*]). This term is related both phonologically and etymologically to the already discussed Proto-Semitic root *ḥṣr*. A related Akkadian term is *ḥa/iṣāru /ḥaṣiru*, "enclosure for sheep", phonetically related to the parallel Proto-Semitic root *ḥṭr* (*AHw* I:331 [*ḥaṣāru(m)*]; *CAD* VI:130 [*ḥaṣāru*]; Del Olmo Lete & Sanmartín 2015:382-383).[31] West Semitic cognates include Ugaritic and Phoenician *ḥṣr*, Aramaic *ḥṭr*, Arabic *ḥẓr*, and Sabaic *mḥẓr*, "enclosure", "courtyard", "sheepfold" (*HALOT* I:345 [III *חצר*]; *TDOT* V:131-139; Beeston *et al.* 1982:75; Hoftijzer & Jongeling 1995:400-401; Zammit 2002:142; Lipiński 2006:105; Tawil 2009:111-118; Halayqa 2013:120-121). As we saw in the discussion of the Hebrew term חצר, both Akkadian terms fit very well in the toponymy world of the Iron Age Negev and southern Transjordan, which of course includes Hazar Addar (Num 34:4). It is not surprising then that Sheshonk I's Karnak list of Negev toponyms presents eight place-names with the component *ḥ-q-r/ḥ-g-r*, which corresponds to the West Semitic root *ḥṣr* (Lipiński 2006:105-106).

The second component of the place-name, ilu (DINGIR), is the common Akkadian term for referring to a deity (*AHw* I:373-374 [*ilu(m)*]; *CAD* VII:91-103 [*ilu*]). The related West Semitic term was *'l* (Hebrew אל; Tawil 2009:19-20), originally the name of Canaanite deity El that had become by the first millennium BCE the common designation for "god". The teophoric name El was widely known in the Ammonite onomastica and in Phoenician inscriptions (Herrmann, W, "El", *DDD*, 274-280; Smith 2002:32-43, 60-64). Most importantly, it was very much present in place and clan names in Canaan and biblical Israel (e.g. Beth-El) (Aharoni 1979:108; Green 2003:278), and site-names with this component were common in the Negev, such as *Jehalle-'el*, *Bt(w)'l*, *Yrḥm-'l*, and *El-ra[m]/El-ro'ī*, listed in the triumphal inscription of Sheshonk I (Lipiński 2006:114, 122-123, 128). This word was also known in the North Arabian realm, as attested by the name of the North Arabian tribe/chief Idiba'ilu (*I-di-ba-'-a-il-a-a/[I]-di-bi-*

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31   This word should not be confused with the well-known Aramaic loanword *ḥadiru*, "pen for small cattle" (*CAD* VI:23 [*ḥadiru*]); Abraham & Sokoloff (2011:33).

'-i-lu) mentioned by Tiglath-Pileser III in the northern Negev and the name of Dumah's god Abirilu (*A-bi-ri-il-lu*), said to be captured by Sennacherib (*ARAB* I:279-280, 83; II:208; Eph'al 1982:24ff; Retsö 2003:134-136, 601).

If our interpretation is valid, then we can read Az/ṣarilu as a term meaning "enclosure/sheepfold of (the) god", pointing again to a plot of land devoted to the sustaining of the worship of some local deity, whose identity is unknown.

4.   THE HISTORICITY AND SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE BIBLICAL WILDERNESS TOPONYMY

In the preceding analysis, we have discovered plausible 7th century BCE parallels, both linguistically and etymologically, for two toponyms in the book of Numbers: Haradah in Num 33:24, one of the Exodus stations traditionally located in the Sinai wasteland southwest of Kadesh Barnea, and Hazar Addar in Num 34:4, one of the place-names in the description of the boundaries of the land placed in the vicinity of Kadesh Barnea – in the one and the same primary source, Assurbanipal's account of his Arabian Wars in the Rassam Cylinder. The etymology of both toponyms finds their closest parallels in the Aramaic/North Arabian-speaking world of the arid margins of the Levant of the first millennium BCE: the names Haradah, probably "cultivated land", and Hazar Addar, most likely "enclosure/sheepfold of the threshing floor", are echoes of the world of small agricultural settlements and semi-pastoral nomadic groups that inhabited in southern Transjordan and the Negev during the Iron Age. These considerations indicate a precise historical dating for the sources of Num 33:5-49 and Num 34:1-12 in the 7th century BCE, rejecting an early (e.g. Late Bronze Age) date for their toponymy and agreeing with several studies that place the origin of these texts in the last century of the existence of the kingdom of Judah.[32]

The parallels found in the Rassam Cylinder have placed Numbers' southern toponyms in a precise historical-geographical scenario: the highly Aramized and Arabianized southern and southeastern arid margins of the Levant in the western peripheries of the Neo-Assyrian world, probably no earlier than the 7th century BCE. These toponyms, probably originating in Aramaic and/or North Arabian dialects, demonstrate how strong were the interregional contacts in the Late Iron Age Negev, Sinai and southern Transjordan.

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32   Such as Redford (1992:408-422); Levin (2006); Finkelstein (2015).

Although the Transjordanian languages of the Iron Age, such as Ammonite, Moabite and Edomite, belonged to the Canaanite dialects, loans of Aramaic vocabulary occurred frequently and the Aramaic script greatly influenced – if not being the mother script, as seems to be the case with Edomite – the local scripts (Garr 2004:231-235; Lemaire 2006:181-183; Rollston 2014). The cause of this influence seems to have been partly politically-induced and partly a result of larger socio-economic processes at work. During the 9th century the Aramaeans of Damascus enjoyed a period of high political influence in the southern Levantine affairs, the most important aspect of which was their control of the northern Transjordanian part of the King's Highway, the cause of many armed conflicts with the kingdom of Israel (Berlejung 2014:353; Sader 2014:35). But it is not necessary to resort to the political influence of the Aramean polities to explain the influence of their language in the southern Levant, because by the 7th century BCE Aramaic had become the *lingua franca* of the ancient Near East, while the administration of the Neo-Assyrian kingdom was highly Aramaized, routinely using bilingual Akkadian-Aramaic documents (Tadmor 1982:449-470; Nissinen 2014:281-282). As we have noted before, Aramaic loanwords in Akkadian were common in this period, but the borrowing of words took both directions (Von Soden 1966; 1968; 1977; Kaufman 1974; Tadmor 1982; Lemaire 2008; Cherry 2009; Fales 2010; Abraham & Sokoloff 2011; Streck 2011). The presence of three Aramaean deities in the pantheon of the oasis town of Tayma demonstrates the southernmost boundaries of the Aramaean cultural influence, probably harking back as early as the 8th century BCE (Maraqten 1996).

North Arabian dialects also played a particularly important role regarding the local toponymy.[33] From as early as the 9th century BCE the Neo-Assyrian inscriptions and iconography record strong contacts between Mesopotamia and the Syro-Arabian desert, particularly the trade of expensive south Arabian aromatics such as incense and myrrh (Magee 2014:207-213, 264-268; Tebes 2014:14-16). The southern Levant, being at the crossroads that connected the Arabian Peninsula with Syria and northern Mesopotamia, received much cultural influence from the Arabian societies, as attested by the findings of objects of Arabian origin (pottery, stone stoppers, incense stands) and inscriptions (seals, bullae, seal impressions, ostraca and sherds) written in North- or South-Arabian languages and scripts (Singer-Avitz 1999; Tebes 2014:14-16; Van der Veen

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33   For the pre-Islamic languages of Northern Arabia, see Macdonald (2000); Hayajneh (2011).

& Bron 2014). Following the success of this lucrative trade network, the Assyrians, no longer willing to deal with the Levantine intermediaries and eager to open new commercial venues with the Arabians and Egypt, carried out an aggressive policy in the West. Since the 730s BCE they launched several military expeditions in Transjordan and the northern Negev, converting the local petty states such as Judah and Edom in their proxy powers in the arid areas. At the same time, the Assyrians encountered in the northern Negev Arabian chiefs that controlled the desert arteries, realistically appointing them as "wardens" with the duty of overseeing and controlling the people and goods that traversed the area (Eph'al 1982:28-30, 32, 37, 26, 91-93, 137-138; Retsö 2003:129-153, 159; Tebes 2014:16). In the southern Levant, the growth of the south Arabian trade, coupled with the expansion of agricultural production to areas previously unoccupied by sedentary population, led to a slow but persistent colonization of the southern arid fringes between the 8th and early 6th centuries BCE, particularly the northern Negev and the Edomite highlands. Most of the new sites were located along trade routes, with major concentrations in the loessical valleys of the northern Negev that connected Edom and the Arabah with the Mediterranean ports. The desert roads to the south connecting the Gulf of Aqaba with the Mediterranean were not left unattended, and major fortified centers were established in 'En Hazeva in the northern Arabah, Tell el-Kheleifeh close to the Gulf of Aqaba, and 'Ain el-Qudeirat and Kuntillet 'Ajrud in the northeastern Sinai.[34] Although nominally managed by Judah and Edom, these sites were likely established by Assyria as an effort to oversee the movement of commodities through these major desert crossroads with the aid of their Judaean and Edomite tributaries (Na'aman 1991:48-49; Finkelstein 2014:101).

It is precisely in the region of 'Ain el-Qudeirat, traditionally identified as the biblical Kadesh Barnea (Cohen & Bernick-Greenberg 2007), where the last place-names in the itinerary list of Num 33:5-49 – among them Haradah – and the southwestern toponyms of the boundary description of Num 34:1-12 – among them Hazar Addar – were located. The conclusion, taking into account the waves of settlement as seen from archaeology and regardless the real ancient name of this and contemporary local sites, is that the late 8th-to-early-6th centuries BCE period provides the best temporal framework for locating the southern toponyms mentioned in the two geographical descriptions.[35] Whether we are dealing with trade arteries or

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34   For good summaries, see Finkelstein (2014:100-101); Thareani (2014).
35   For similar recent archaeologically-based conclusions, see Finkelstein (2015).

pilgrim routes re-signified as Exodus itineraries, or a combination of both, it is clear that the wilderness stations should be located in a late Iron Age setting. What is interesting and probably revealing is that the closest geographical and temporal parallels for Haradah and Hazar Addar are two Edomite place-names whose meaning is highly reminiscent of a cultic context: Ḫiratâqaz/ṣaya, probably "cultivated land of Qos", and Az/ṣarilu, read here as "enclosure/sheepfold of (the) god". Taking the evidence as a whole, I would tentatively suggest that both Haradah and Hazar Addar can be interpreted as desert sacred places. The meaning of one of these place-names, Hazar Addar, "enclosure/sheepfold of the threshing floor", is not totally devoid of sacred connotations. In the ancient Near East, threshing floors, as shown by biblical, Egyptian, Ugaritic and Mesopotamian sources, were associated not only with the daily economic routines, but were also considered as sacred spaces connected with human death and chtonic divinities.[36] So far no Iron Age open-air sanctuaries similar to Horvat Qitmit, 'En Hazeva and Wadi at-Thamad 13 have been identified in the area of Kadesh Barnea, although the much larger site of Kuntillet 'Ajrud, located some 50 km to the south, was certainly used by visitors as a sanctuary for the worship of Yahweh and other deities.[37] In any case, a cultic interpretation of the sites Haradah and Hazar Addar would add more evidence to the old theory that the camp-stations of the Israelite pilgrim routes of the late Iron Age were understood by the early biblical writers and readers as stops in the wilderness taken by the Israelites during the Exodus.[38]

This conclusion raises several methodological questions, the most significant of which is how we categorize the historical value of the different layers of texts that compose Numbers, in this case a boundary description (Num 34:1-12) usually considered to be more historically accurate than a desert itinerary (Num 33:5-49). By finding reasonable parallels in a Neo-Assyrian inscription, we have demonstrated that the geographical information contained in both sources should be considered to be genuine. Numbers' wilderness toponyms accounts are embedded in the writers' deep theological motives and should not be judged along the rigid parameters of modern history, not to mention to regard them as

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36   E.g., the threshing floor of Atad as the place for mourning Jacob's death (Gen 50:10-11); Tebes, "Atad", *EBR* 2:1174-1175. For the sacred significance of threshing floors in the Bible, see, most recently, Waters (2015); Prosic (2016).

37   See Meshel (2012).

38   As already suggested by Noth (1968:246); see also Smith (1997).

"fictional" stories. They provide precise information on the historical geography of the Sinai and the Negev of their time. It is only by investigating thoroughly for possible parallels in contemporary sources and languages (such as, as we have found, Akkadian, Aramaic and North Arabian dialects) that a plausible socio-historical setting can be found. It is accurate to state that the authors of the wilderness itineraries did not have in mind to write an exact account of the routes followed by the Israelites on their way to the land of Canaan, but probably to extrapolate some trade or pilgrim routes – to Mount Sinai or to Kuntillet 'Ajrud? – they were aware of to the time of the Exodus.

Where did the wilderness toponymy originally come from? The easiest answer would be to assume the biblical writers took as departure travel routes reported by merchants or pilgrims arriving home from the southern regions.[39] Copying of state documents recording royal tax lists or military campaigns and raids, however, should not be set aside,[40] particularly in the light of the Judaean policy of collaboration with Assyria in the Negev and the Assyrian control of the main desert crossroads through fortified centers during most of the 7th century BCE. Given the close similarity we have found between two biblical and two Neo-Assyrian wilderness toponyms, it is not impossible to think that Judaean scribes had access to information on desert place-names in the Negev shared between Judaean and Assyrian civil or military administrators. Epigraphic finds in Judaean fortified centers in the Beersheba Valley, such as Tel 'Arad and Horvat 'Uza, demonstrate the presence of Judaean state officers overseeing matters of military organization, economic administration and trade affairs (Na'aman 2011; 2012; 2015), and information on the local toponymy should have reached the royal central archives through the standard bureaucratic channels.

In sum, the analysis of Rassam Cylinder's southern Transjordanian place-names strongly suggests that the Aramized and Arabianized toponymy found in Numbers' geographical descriptions fits well into a specific historical setting: the arid margins of the southern Levant during the time of the Neo-Assyrian hegemony over the area, most likely the 7th century BCE. How earlier or later depends on linguistic changes in the local toponymy that we cannot control given the general lack of epigraphic

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39   The presence of Arabian traders in Jerusalem during the 7th – late 6th centuries BCE is demonstrated by three ostraca incised with south Arabian names found in the City of David (Sass 1990; Tebes 2011b:314-315; Van der Veen & Bron 2014:218).

40   For the latter case, see Davies (1974).

evidence for this period. Yet, what we can be certain of is that both geographical descriptions – Num 34:1-12 and Num 33:5-49 – should be *a priori* regarded as equally valuable historical sources, no longer holding true the traditional superiority of one text over the other. An important methodological conclusion that, if applied wisely, can give fruitful results in the study and comparison of analogous narratives in the Hebrew Bible.

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