The Book of the Wars of the Lord (Num. 21:14–20):
Philology and Hydrology, Geography and Ethnography

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In memory of Louis and Jennie Weiss לזר, the chieftain and noblewoman who dug the well from which I and my extended family have drawn for five generations.

Num. 21:14 contains one of the most enigmatic phrases in the Pentateuch: אֶת־וָהֵבָּב. The usual interpretations of אֶת turn the phrase into gibberish because they require the presence of a verb, which is nowhere to be found. Some scholars have supplied an understood verb; others have resorted to emendation. A better solution is available: אֶת in our passage is a verb masquerading as a preposition. It is easily construed, without the slightest change, as an archaic apocopated/biliteral imperative of אָתָּה, meaning “come!”

This construal of אֶת transforms our understanding of Num. 21:14–20 in many ways. For example, it reveals that ולְכִּי אָמַרְתֶּם מִלְחֲמָי ‘,על־כֵּן יֵאָמַר בְּסֵפֶר מִלְחֲמֹת ה The usual interpretations of אֶת turn the phrase into gibberish because they require the presence of a verb, which is nowhere to be found. Some scholars have supplied an understood verb; others have resorted to emendation. A better solution is available: אֶת in our passage is a verb masquerading as a preposition. It is easily construed, without the slightest change, as an archaic apocopated/biliteral imperative of אָתָּה, meaning “come!”

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INTRODUCTION

Numbers 21 contains an excerpt from the “Book of the Wars of the Lord” (henceforth, the/our excerpt). Many scholars believe that the excerpt consists of “only a few damaged lines”¹ (viz., vv. 14b–15), from which “even the main verb has disappeared,”² and that it is “no longer intelligible to us.”³

In this study, I shall argue that the aforementioned belief is incorrect. The excerpt turns out to be surprisingly intelligible, once it is recognized that 1) v. 14b, without any consonantal or vocalic change, has verbs hiding in plain sight; 2) those verbs form clauses whose meaning is elucidated by numerous parallels, in the same chapter and elsewhere; and 3) the excerpt extends to v. 20:

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I shall further argue that a close reading of this longer passage reveals that it is a poetic exhortation to visit inspiring sites, most of them 1) located in and around the Desert of Kedemoth and the Steppes of Moab; and 2) related to the Lord’s wars with Transjordanian rulers. The following translation, containing some explanatory interpolations in parentheses (especially in v. 14), can serve as an introduction to the proposed reading:

[14] On account of that, it is said in the Book of the Wars of the Lord:
(If you wish to be inspired by the wonders that Israel experienced during the period of conflict with Sihon, Og, Balak, and the five Midianite rulers,) come to (Mt.) Waheb (in the Desert of Kedemoth) during a storm, and come to the Arnon’s (tributary) wadis (surrounding that mountain),

[15] and to the confluence of those wadis (at that mountain), (the confluence) that turns toward the settled area of Ar and hugs (lit. leans against) the (northern) border of Moab.

[16] And from there, (the confluence at Mt. Waheb, come) to the/a well—the well about which the Lord said to Moses,

“Aassemble the people that I may give them water.”

[17] It was on that occasion that Israel sang this song:

“Spring up, O well! Sing (O Israel) to/of it!

[18] The well that the chieftains dug,
that the nobles of the people excavated,
with (only) a scepter, with their own staffs—
a gift (mattanah) from the desert.”

[19] And from (that well, named) Mattanah,
(come) to Nahaliel (“mighty canyons”),
and from Nahaliel, (come) to Bamoth(-baal),

[20] and from Bamoth(-baal),
(come) to the valley (in front of Baal’s temple on Mt. Peor)
in the open country of Moab,
(and) to the top of Pisgah,
overlooking the wasteland.
THE PHILOLOGICAL PROBLEM AND PREVIOUS SOLUTIONS

The first one and a half verses of the excerpt, Num. 21:14b–15, have defied the best efforts of leading text critics. George Buchanan Gray described them as “an obscure fragment beginning in the middle of one sentence and breaking off in the middle of the next.”4 W. F. Albright referred to them as a “fragment … which cannot be reconstructed.”5 Martin Noth concluded that “the quotation has been transmitted in such a fragmentary and obviously, in part, incorrect fashion that it defies all explanation.”6 More recently, Horst Seebass has conceded that “because of the state of the text, a universally satisfactory solution is hardly to be found,”7 adding that “whoever raises to a dogma (the view of) MT as the only admissible text will stay with its incomprehensible wording.”8

Not surprisingly, the inability of scholars to make sense of Num. 21:14–15 has led to skepticism about the surrounding verses as well. J. Maxwell Miller describes Num. 21:10–20 as a passage “which commentators and biblical cartographers have struggled with for years on the mistaken assumption that it is supposed to make geographical sense. But it simply does not ….”9 Christian Frevel asks whether Num. 21:10–20 is a “geographical and redactional hodgepodge” and answers in the affirmative.10

Let us examine this infamous crux more closely. The quotation from the Book of the Wars of the Lord begins with one of the most enigmatic phrases in the Pentateuch: אֶת־וָהֵב (בְּסוּפָה Num. 21:14). The first word in this phrase, אֶת, looks like the so-called “accusative marker” (i.e., the preposition used to mark definite direct objects),11 and that is the way most exegetes have understood it. The problem is that this interpretation of אֶת seems to turn the phrase into gibberish because “Waheb and the valleys are in the accusative case and require a verb to govern them.”12

According to Arnold Ehrlich, there is also a secondary problem: the direct object marker “occurs extremely rarely elsewhere in poetry.”13 Ehrlich’s claim is significant, even if it is overstated. The direct object marker אֶת is one of the so-called “prose particles,” which are used sparingly in poetry, especially in the poetry of the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets.14

8. Ibid., 335.
11. As recognized by many linguists, the direct object marker is a preposition. However, none of the arguments presented below depends on this classification.
A few medieval Jewish exegetes and modern scholars have believed that the context calls for the other preposition אֶת, the one that means “with” when governing a personal name and “next to” when governing a place name. This preposition, sometimes called comitative (= expressing accompaniment), is a homonym of the direct object marker. Interpreting our אֶת as comitative eliminates the secondary problem, but not the primary one. We are still dealing with a sentence fragment in search of a verb. In that respect, the only difference between the two prepositional interpretations of אֶת is whether the missing verb is transitive or intransitive.

One noteworthy response to this problem appears in an eleventh-century Hebrew commentary from Castoria, the Legah Ṭov of Tobias b. Eliezer: “—אֶת־וָהֵב he came and gave (בַּא וַיֶּן) signs and wonders.” This comment appears to suggest that both אֶת and וָהֵב are verbs—perfects (3ms) of roots known primarily from Aramaic but attested in Biblical Hebrew poetry as well. Tobias b. Eliezer was preceded by at least one exegete in his interpretation of וָהֵב, but I know of no other Jewish exegete—before or after him—who took אֶת as a verb. It was not until 900 years later that Duane Christensen hit upon a similar solution, revocalizing את as a verb in the perfect, viz., אתא. His treatment of את was initially welcomed by scholars, despite the additional emendations that it entailed. In recent decades, however, those emendations have been criticized as excessive and unnecessary.

** ואת: A NEW SUGGESTION**

My own interpretation agrees with these earlier interpretations (of which I was not initially aware) in taking את as a verb from the poetic Hebrew root י-ת-א, “come.” However, I see no reason to take את as a perfect, against the received vocalization. I submit that ואת in

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16. Thus, (וְשֵׁרֵת את־אֶחָיו Num. 8:26) can mean either “he shall serve with his brothers” or “he shall serve his brothers,” and, indeed, both interpretations are found in the targums. Note that the two prepositions are homonymous only when they are unsuffixed. With suffixes, there is normally a contrast between accusative אוֹת ~ אוֹתְ and comitative אִתּ.

17. Tobias b. Eliezer, מדרש לֵו וּאֵבַן המְנֻהַת מִסְפָּרָה וּסְפָרָיהּ על חמשה חומשי תורה (Vilna, 1884), 248 II. 2–3.

18. See below.

19. According to some commentaries on Numbers Rabba, the latter equates ואת in our verse with the noun אוֹת, “sign”; see also Seebass (Numeri, 2: 329, 331), who emends ואת to a different form of י-ת-א, viz., jussive את.


our excerpt is quite naturally construed—without the slightest change in spelling or vocalization—as an apocopated or biliteral imperative of יִתְחָל, “come.”

This is an archaic form, belonging to the poetic dialect of Hebrew. Its closest relatives are 1) the imperfect יִתְחָל, “it shall come” (Mic. 4:8); 2) the converted apocopated/biliteral imperfect יָאָת, “and he has come” (Isa. 41:25); 24 and 3) the Arabic conjoined masc. sing. imperative form فَأْتِ, “and come.” The relationship between רָאָת and יִתְחָל is essentially the same as that between the apocopated/biliteral imperfect forms יָאָת, יָאָת, יָאָת, and יָאָת respectively. We may note that the apocopated/biliteral imperative form יִתְחָל is attested in Num. 20:25, only eighteen verses before what I am arguing is the apocopated/biliteral imperative form רָאָת.

My claim is not that רָאָת was the only imperative of יִתְחָל in BH. It may well have coexisted with an unapocopated imperative form. יָאָת* (or יִתְחָל*), just as the apocopated imperative forms יָאָת, יָאָת, יָאָת, and יָאָת coexisted with the unapocopated imperative forms רָאָת, רָאָת, רָאָת, and רָאָת. However, it must be stressed that no unapocopated singular imperative form is attested for יִתְחָל in the Bible.

As for the vowel of רָאָת, it is precisely what one would expect in an imperative of a I-IIIy root, judging from the (poetic) triliteral plural imperative יִתְחָל, “come!” (Isa. 21:12, 56:9, 12), and the biliteral plural imperative רָאָת, “bake!” (Exod. 16:23). In a stressed syllable, the apocopated/biliteral singular would have been רָאָת, with a sere. In our verse, however, the imperative is unstressed, pronounced together with the following word (proclitic), as indicated by the maqqef in רָאָת. In the latter, we find the underlying sere shortened and lowered to segol, as is usual in a closed unstressed syllable. This alternation is well attested in all grammatical categories, including imperative forms that resemble the imperative יָאָת ~ רָאָת.

An example involving a biliteral imperative is יִתְחָל in b. Ta‘anit 23b, see William Wright, et al., A Grammar of the Arabic Language (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1896–1898), 1: 74. The short final i preserved in the Arabic form, like all final short high vowels, would have been lost in Hebrew.

26. Note that these examples, like others that come to mind, are from the derived stems. In BH prose, Iflows qal verbs are not attested with an apocopated/biliteral imperative, but, as noted, we are dealing here with the archaic poetic dialect of BH. It is also possible that the exceptional behavior of יִתְחָל is related to the fact that it is doubly weak: I as well as IIy. Contrast the syllable structure of יִתְחָל and יָאָת—both with quiescent aleph—with that of, say, תָּשֶׁם and יִתְחָל.

27. That the Aramaic cognate of this imperative had a similar first vowel can be deduced from the use of matres lectionis in Late Aramaic dialects. For the Galilean Aramaic imperatives יָאָת (2ms) and יָאָת (2mpl), see Michael Sokoloff, A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period, 3rd ed. (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan Univ. Press, 2017), 58b s.v. יָאָת. For the Jewish Babylonian Aramaic imperative יָאָת in b. Ta‘anit 23b, see idem, A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan Univ. Press, 2002), 176a s.v. יָאָת. See also Matthew Morgenstern, Aramaic Verbal Roots and Reflexive Verbs (PhD diss., Hebrew Univ., 2002), 351: יָאָת. For cuneiform i-ta(-a), rendering the Aramaic imperative, see Klaus Beyer, Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984–), 1: 525 s.v. יָאָת and the literature cited there.

23. It is apocopated (shortened through deletion of a final vowel) from a synchronous perspective. Diachronically, however, it may be just the opposite: a survival from a pre-Hebrew biliteral (i.e., biconsonantal) root יִתְחָל that was later “triliteralized.” For other examples of this diachronic process, see Richard C. Steiner, “Ancient Hebrew,” in The Semitic Languages, ed. Robert Hetzron (London: Routledge, 1997), 155–56.

24. The form רָאָת is derived from רָאָת (cf. רָאָת and perhaps, as suggested by an anonymous reader, אָהָת). I suggest that the vowel was shortened in a closed syllable (cf. אָהָת, etc) and then lowered to a by Philippi’s law (cf. אָהָת, אָהָת, etc.).

25. See William Wright, et al., A Grammar of the Arabic Language (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1896–1898), 1: 74. The short final i preserved in the Arabic form, like all final short high vowels, would have been lost in Hebrew.
The alternation אֵת ~ אֶת־ is, of course, ubiquitous with the two homonymous prepositions—one accusative and the other comitative.

In sum, we are dealing with at least three homonyms sharing the form אֶת־: two prepositions plus one imperative verb. Although imperative אֶת־ is rare, no Semitic linguist will be surprised to find a rare form, predicted by both internal reconstruction and comparative reconstruction, in archaic poetic Hebrew.

To whom is the imperative אֶת, “come,” addressed? Who is urged to come? Two answers are possible, both of them based on the view of the overwhelming majority of modern scholars that והב is a place name. One possibility is that the imperative is addressed to the Lord, in a petition for assistance on the eve of battle with Sihon. Another possibility—the one selected here—follows from the fact that, it is said in the Book of the Wars of the Lord, ‘Come to (Mt.) Waheb,’” bears a striking resemblance to “,עַל־כֵּן יֹאמְרֻ הַמֹּשְׁלִים בֹּאוּ חֶשְׁבּוֹן. On account of that, the bards say, ‘Come to Heshbon,’” only thirteen verses later. This similarity suggests that the (singular) imperative is addressed (personally) to (each member of) the bard’s audience. We shall return to this point later.

This word has been interpreted in several different ways. According to Judah Ibn Quraysh (beginning of the tenth century), it is a verb meaning “gave,” related to Aramaic הוּב wubah, “id.” He renders אֶת־וָהֵב as “that which he gave them in the way of help” (אלנצרה מה והב להם מן), explaining the phrase as a reference to giving the Israelites water to quench their thirst. Rashi’s paraphrase, “that which he gave them” (אֶת־וָהֵב) is very similar. As noted above, Tobias b. Eliezer takes אֶת־וָהֵב to mean “he came and gave (signs and wonders).” Joseph Bekhor Shor takes wahab as a single word—a verb similar in its root and stem to targumic אתיהב was given (Num. 26:62). As evidence for the existence of a form אתוהב derived from, he cites הִתְוַדַּע (Gen. 45:1) derived


30. See below.

31. Cf. Weippert, “Israelite ‘Conquest.’”, 18: “The common reference to Ar and to the Arnon connects this fragment to the Heshbon song in Num. 21:27b–30.” Nahmanides goes further, asserting that the Heshbon song is also from the Book of the Wars of the Lord; see סדר לשורות המפרישות אתה, ed. Charles Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1965), 2: 284 ll. 4–9. Note that in both of the exhortations, the word for “come” takes a toponym—the name of the destination—as its direct object; cf. also והב (Amos 4:4), cited below. The transitive use of והב is very old and widespread in West Semitic; see Richard C. Steiner, Early Northwest Semitic Serpent Spells in the Pyramid Texts (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 36.

32. For a survey of attempts to make sense of this form, see David Ben-Gad Hacohen, Cathedral 95 (2000): 7–8.

33. Judah Ibn Quraysh, ,-דוקטלאוּת רָבָתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה רָשָׁתָה Rashi’s paraphrase, “that which he gave them” (אֶת־וָהֵב) is very similar. As noted above, Tobias b. Eliezer takes אֶת־וָהֵב to mean “he came and gave (signs and wonders).” Joseph Bekhor Shor takes wahab as a single word—a verb similar in its root and stem to targumic אתיהב was given (Num. 26:62). As evidence for the existence of a form ואתוהב derived from, he cites הִתְוַדַּע (Gen. 45:1) derived

34. Ibid.
from וָהֵב to mean that the Moabite king found himself (“was placed”) in the midst of a devastating “storm” when the Amorites attacked. 35

A new approach to בְּסוּפָה was adopted in the twelfth century by Abraham Ibn Ezra. The latter accepted Jonah Ibn Janāḥ’s view of בְּסוּפָה as a toponym but went further, pointing to its initial וָהֵב as evidence of non-Hebraic origin. In the eighteenth century, Jean Le Clerc (Clericus) went even further, suggesting that בְּסוּפָה was the name used by local Arabs for the place known to the Israelites as מַתָּנָה. 36 Samuel Lee accepted Le Clerc’s suggestion, adding: “In the Kāmoos we have Wahbin, given as the name of a place, and, Mawhabah, as the name of a fortress in Senaa: whence it should seem that it was not unusual to give such names to places.” 37 Franz Delitzsch, by contrast, rejected Le Clerc’s identification of בְּסוּפָה with מַתָּנָה. In his view, בְּסוּפָה must have meant “the giving, perhaps generous, willingly bestowing place.” 38 This gloss, presumably pointing to an active participle, eliminated any basis for identifying בְּסוּפָה with מַתָּנָה. G. R. Driver took this further: “Wāḥēb [the Moabite name of the ass, “watershed,”] is simply the Arab. wāḥibu(n) ‘giver … being so called as the source giving or providing the waters of the Arnon; so mawhabatu(n) ‘gift’ from the same root means also ‘small bog; ditch on a mountain where water lingers.’ Such an Arabism is nothing surprising in the Moabite dialect.” 39

In a short encyclopedia entry, S. E. Loewenstamm compared בְּסוּפָה with personal names and place names containing the root w-h-b in Arabic, as Samuel Lee had done earlier. Thanks to the work of Ryckmans, he was able to add Epigraphic South Arabian names as well. These names led him to suggest that בְּסוּפָה is a place name derived from the name of a person or tribe. 40 Not long afterwards, Ernst Knauf published a short article presenting similar evidence. 41 He concluded that if Masoretic בְּסוּפָה is to be retained and interpreted as the name of a place or person, Arabs must have been involved in the events surrounding the Arnon toward the end of the second millennium BCE. 42 Knauf later returned to this topic briefly, adding that Wahb is attested as a personal name already in two cuneiform transcriptions: "מַתָּנָה (Esarhaddon) and מַתָּנָה (Assurbanipal). 43 Against virtually all of his predecessors in the medieval and modern

35. See Joseph Bekhor Shor, מַגָּר וּמִמְדָּבָר: יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּבֵית הָעָם, ed. Yeshoshafat Nevo (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1994), 280 to Num. 21:14. His gloss of מַתָּנָה with מַתָּנָה is excellent for his purpose, since מַתָּנָה can mean “was placed” as well as “was given.” Much of his discussion appears virtually verbatim in later exegetical works from Northern France; see also David Qimḥi, הָכִתְבָּה (Berlin: Bethge, 1847), 84a s.v. בְּסוּפָה.

36. Jean Le Clerc, Mosis prophetae libri quatuor, Exodus, Leviticus, Numeri, et Deuteronomium ex translatione Joannis Clerici (Amsterdam: Schelte, 1710), 417. For others who asserted that the etymological meaning of the toponym בְּסוּפָה, like that of the toponym מַתָּנָה (Num. 21:19), is “gift” and concluded that the two toponyms refer to the same place, see, in the following century, Jakob Z. Meklenburg, הָכִיתְבָּה (Nuremberg: Bulka, 1924), 4: 33 s.v. מַתָּנָה; and Melchisedek, הָכִיתְבָּה (Jerusalem: Pardes, 1956), 1330 s.v. מַתָּנָה.


42. Ibid., 40.

periods, Knauf concluded this time that  גוב in Num. 21:14 is the name of a person—not a place—with  אטת גוב בם פסא reflecting an original ʿatā Wahbu bi-sūpati, “Wahb brought a storm wind.”

In my view, the conclusion offered in Knauf’s later discussion represents a step backward. It does not give sufficient weight to a piece of evidence that supports earlier scholars—evidence that he himself cites in a footnote in his earlier study. There he mentions that al-Bakrī’s Arabic geographical dictionary gives Wāhib as the name of a mountain located in the territory of the Banū Sulaym tribe (ḥuwa jabalun li-banī sulaym).

This datum is quite significant because, if  גוב is the Hebrew rendering of an Ancient North Arabian (ANA) form, that form, as recognized by Delitzsch and Driver, is the participle wāhib or wāheb rather than the noun wahb.

In light of the above, I suggest that  גוב is the name of a mountain. That is not to say that  וָהֵב and the Banū Sulaym tribe and  גוב are the same mountain. My suggestion, rather, is that wāhib (literally, “giver, donor”) may have been an ANA term for a desert mountain providing abundant water for human consumption and runoff agriculture, a term that turned into the name of a mountain in at least two locales.

In support of this conjecture, I would note that Arabic mawhiba/mawhaba, a noun whose basic meaning is “gift,” has a number of derived meanings connected with rain and rainwater, including “a small pool of water left by a torrent” and “a small hollow or cavity in a mountain, in which water stagnates.”

This noun was controversial in the Middle Ages, some exegetes understanding it as a place name and others taking it to be a common noun meaning “storm.” The latter view is the one that prevails in modern scholarship, and it is the one assumed here. The audience is urged to come to Mt. Wahb in a storm in order to comprehend some of what Israel experienced there. We are perhaps to assume that, prior to the outbreak of hostilities, the Lord came to Mt. Wahb in a torrential storm. Many exegetes, medieval and modern, cite בְּסוּפָה וּבִשְׂעָרָה דַּרְכּוֹ, “the Lord’s way is in storm and tempest” (Nah. 1:3), as a parallel. One might also cite בָּאֵשׁ יָבוֹא וְכַסּוּפָה מַרְכְּבֹתָיו, “the Lord will come in fire; like a storm, (in) his chariots” ( Isa. 66:15). Furthermore, the phrase כְּסוּפָה יֶאֱתֶה, “will come like a storm”

this rendering is, no doubt, that intervocalic Akkadian m was realized as [w] in Babylonia—a realization reflected in Akkadian loanwords in Aramaic and Hebrew as well; see Stephen A. Kaufman, The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1974), 143.

44. Knauf, Midian, 92. This rendering assigns a distinctly Arabic meaning, “brought,” to ʿatā bi-.

45. Abū ʿUbayd ʿAbdallāh al-Bakrī, Kitāb Muʿjam mā (i)staʿjam, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (Göttingen: Dietrich, 1876–77), 2: 848 ll. 5–6; Knauf, גוב, 37–38 n. 18. The same entry is found in works by al-Zamakhsharī and others.

46. Note that the Hebrew rendering of the ANA participle would have postdated the Canaanite vowel shift; hence the rendering of ʾa with (the ancestor of) qameṣ instead of holam.

47. In other words, גוב could be called “the giving/donor mountain”; cf. Delitzsch’s etymology cited above. For runoff agriculture, see Michael Evenari et al., The Negev: The Challenge of a Desert (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), 95–300. For further discussion of גוב, see below.


49. I am indebted to Edward Greenstein (email communication) for this interpretation of Isa. 66:15, according to which “there is gapping here and the B line should be understood: ‘(The Lord will come in) his chariot(s) like a storm.’” He adds that “he will come in fire” and “he will come in his chariot(s)” represent lightning and storm
(Prov. 1:27), provides some support to the suggestion that בָּשַׁבְיָה means “come … in a storm.” In addition to demonstrating the Lord’s presence and terrifying Israel’s foes (cf. בָּשַׁבְיָה in Ps. 83:16), such a storm would have provided water to the thirsty Israelite warriors at the well of the chieftains and elsewhere.  

As recognized already in the nineteenth century, הַנְּחָלִים אַרְנוֹן is an appositional phrase, comparable to נַחַל פְּרָת (1 Chr. 5:9), נַחַל אָרְיוֹן (Ezra 8:21), נַחַל שֻׁם (1 Kgs. 16:24), נַחַל שֹׁמְרוֹן (Num. 34:2), and so on. An unambiguous Akkadian parallel is found twice at Mari: nahlum Haqat, translated “l’ouâdi Haqat” in ARM (VI 2: 5 and 4: 7) and “the wadi (called) Haqat” alongside “the wadi Haqat” in CAD. The ending of nahlum signals that the following attributive noun is appositive rather than genitive. In English, we find similar phrases, such as the River Nile and (with the head noun in the plural) the Brothers Karamazov/Grimm. There is no need to make הַנְּחָלִים אַרְנוֹן singular by interpreting it as a genitive phrase with enclitic mem, as some scholars do. The plural was well explained already by George Adam Smith:

The Arnon is the present Wady Mojib, an enormous trench across the plateau of Moab … About thirteen miles from the Dead Sea the trench divides into two branches, one running north-east, the other south-south-east, and each of them again dividing into two … The southern branch, the present Seil Saʿideh, called also Safiah, is the principal one, but all the branches probably carried the name Arnon from the main valley right up to the desert. It is not the valley but the valleys of Arnon, which are named in the ancient fragment of song celebrating Israel’s passage …

In other words, the phrase הַנְּחָלִים אַרְנוֹן is the name of a torrent system, one that is partly ephemeral and partly perennial. It can refer “not just to the main stream of the Arnon, but to the whole system of streams that feeds into it, all of which were probably known by the one name Arnon (in addition to their own names).” Seebass points out that this interpretation of the phrase fits nicely with the broad use of the term Apvo(α) noted by Dieter Vieweger in Eusebius’s Onomasticon. Thus, the literal meaning of the phrase is “the Wadis Arnon.” In the context of our excerpt, however, it refers to only part of the system, the part that sur-

50. See further below.
53. I am indebted to Owen Cyrilnik for the latter example.
54. Albright, Jahweh, 44; Christensen, “Num. 21:14–15,” 360 n. 7, etc.
rounds Mt. Waheb almost completely, as discussed below. That is the basis for the rendering above: "the Arnon’s (tributary) wadis (surrounding that mountain)."

אֶשֶׁד הַנְּחָלִים

This phrase is rendered above as “the confluence of those wadis,” referring to both 1) the spot where the two streams (torrents) converge; and 2) the combined stream (torrent) that flows from that spot, which, in our case, “turns toward the settled area of Ar.” In this phrase, אֶשֶׁד (from the root א-ש-ד, “pour,” known primarily from Aramaic) is rendered by Onqelos with Aramaic שָׁפוֹךְ (from the root ש-פ-ך, “pour”). Medieval Jewish exegetes compare this rendering to Onqelos’s rendering of אַשְׁדֹּת הַפִּסְגָּה (Deut. 3:17) with מִשְׁפַּךְ מֵירָמְתָא and, in the opposite direction, to Onqelos’s rendering of שֶׁפֶךְ הַדֶּשֶׁן (Lev. 4:12) with בֵּית מֵישַׁד. קִטְמָא

We should also note the rendering of אֶשֶׁד with מצבָּב (maṣabbun) in Saadia Gaon’s Tafsīr. Oeuvres complètes de R. Saadia ben Iosef al-Fayıyûmî, ed. J. Derenbourg (Paris: Leroux, 1893–99), 1: 226 l. 6.

60. Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon, 1640a s.v.

61. Cf. David Qimhi, מִי–מָדוּבָא, 28b s.v.: “the slope of a mountain or hill, so called because water … pours down via the slope.” The precise relationship between תֹּרָה וַאֵשֶׁד and אֶשֶׁד is unclear. It is possible that the singular of תֹּרָה וַאֵשֶׁד is an unattested אֲשֵׁדוֹת, distinct from אֶשֶׁד. Alternatively, אֶשֶׁד may be the construct form of an unattested אַשְׁדּוֹת, just as כֶּתֶף and כֶּתֶפָּה are the construct forms of זֶרֶךְ and זֶרֵכָה, respectively. If the latter alternative is true, אֶשֶׁד is the singular of תֹּרָה וַאֵשֶׁד, which, in turn, is the construct of תֹּרָה.

63. See CAD Š/3, 183, where the meaning “settled area of a town” is given for šubtu A 4c.

This phrase is elliptical, lacking the verb of motion expected with phrases of the form “from there to X.” It is usually assumed that the understood verb is the perfect נָסְעוּ. That assumption makes וּמִשָּׁם בְּאֵרָה a continuation of the itinerary in Num. 21:12–13: מִשָּׁם נָסָעוּ מִשָּׁם נָסָעוּ וַיַּחֲנוּ מֵעֵבֶר אַרְנוֹן... וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּנַחַל זָרֶד. It makes vv. 14b–15 a digression—a brief excerpt from the Book of the Wars of the Lord—after which, in v. 16, “the chronicle resumes its delineation of the Israelite route, taking up where Numbers 21:13 left off.” This reading, however, is problematic because it creates “three stations in vv. 18b–20 which are not attested elsewhere (Mattanah, Nahaliel, Bamoth).” By contrast, in the reading presented here, Mattanah, Nahaliel, and Bamoth are not stations, although at least two of them are in the vicinity of stations. The reading takes וּמִשָּׁם בְּאֵרָה as a continuation of the exhortation in 21:14b–15, with the understood verb being the imperative אֶת ,הָעַל "come"; cf. וּלְכוּ מִשָּׁם חֲמַת רַבָּה (רַבָּה Amos 6:2). In other words, the audience is urged to come and see “the well that the chieftains dug, that the nobles of the people excavated.” We may perhaps compare what the Rabbis say about that well, which they call “Miriam’s well,” in the Talmud: הרוצח לראות בארה של מרים יעלה לראש הכרמל ויצפה ויראה כמין כברה בים וזו היא.Emitraח של מרים, “He who wishes to see Miriam’s well should ascend to the summit of Mt. Carmel and look out, and he will see a sort of sieve in the sea—that will be Miriam’s well” (b. Shabbat 35a). Here, too, the well of Num. 21 is portrayed as a sightseeing attraction.

The word בְּאֵרָה is ambiguous in its own right. It can be taken to mean “to Beer” (a toponym) or, as assumed here, “to the/a well” (a common noun). If בְּאֵרָה means “to the well,” it resembles אַרְצָה, which frequently means “to the earth/ground” (Gen. 24:52, 38:9, 44:11, Exod. 4:3, 9:23, 33, 1 Sam. 14:45, 26:20, 2 Sam. 2:22, etc.), despite the absence of the definite article. בְּאֵרָה is indefinite, it refers to a well whose identity is established in the immediately following phrase and whose name, we later learn, is מַתָּנָה.

65. See already Saadia Gaon (Oeuvres complètes, vol. 1, 226 l. 7: “and they traveled from there to the well”), Ibn Ezra, etc. As a parallel one might cite וְאַרְכָּב מַכָּרָה מִן־הַגֻּדְגֹּדָה וּמִן־הַגֻּדְגֹּדָה יָטְבָתָה (Deut. 10:7), with understandings in the second half. For a claim that the understood verb cannot be נָסְעוּ, see Hayyim Paltiel, ספרי הרashi על התורה, ed. Isaak S. Lange (Jerusalem: n.p., 1981), 539 to Num. 21:16.

66. Levine, Numbers 21–36, 95. See already the comment of Nahmanides on וְאַרְכָּב מַתָּנָה in פירושי התורה, vol. 2, 284 ll. 20–21. Another possibility, pointed out to me by Adina Moszavi (email communication), would be to take וּמִשָּׁם בְּאֵרָה as a continuation of the relative clause that modifies אֶשֶּׁד הַנְּחָלִים. In that case, the understood verb could be עָלֵה.


68. The interchange of א-ת-י and ה-ל-ך in expressing “come from there” may be compared with the interchange of ב-ו-א and ה-ל-ך in similar phrases. For example, in 1 Kings 13 we find two ways of expressing “come home with me,” viz., בֹּאָה אִתִּי הַבַּיְתָה (v. 7) and לֵךְ אִתִּי הַבָּיְתָה (v. 15).

69. The Rabbis pictured Miriam’s well as a round stone vessel perforated like a sieve, with water gushing from the holes, that accompanied the Israelites in the desert (cf. the allusion to this midrash in 1 Cor. 10:4). In Palestinian sources (Leviticus Rabbah and the Palestinian Talmud), the mountain is called הר ישימון and the sea is ים שלטבריה, the Sea of Galilee. The name הר ישימון is presumably derived from Num. 21:19 and/or 23:28.

70. Contra Gray (Numbers, 288), who argues that the interpretation “to the well,” assumed by the Septuagint, is precluded by its lack of a definite article. For “to the well” in Saadia Gaon’s translation, see n. 65 above.

71. This interpretation is similar to that of Seebass, Numeri, 2: 334. According to him, באכן means “to a well,” and באכן is “a place or a tract of land that . . . was situated near the divine well and for that very reason was called ‘Gift.’”
עֱנוּ־לָהּ

The command to sing, עֱנוּ־לָהּ, contains a seemingly ambiguous preposition. It can apparently mean either “sing to!” or “sing of it!” In support of “sing to,” we may cite יִעְנֵנַה בְּתוֹדָה, “sing to the Lord with thanksgiving!” (Ps. 147:7). For “sing of,” we may compare כֶּרֶם חֶמֶד עֱנוּ־לָהּ, “a delightful vineyard, sing of it!” (Isa. 27:2). The latter parallel, involving an inanimate noun, seems more relevant to our case, despite the vocalization of עֱנוּ as a pi’el.

It has been claimed that the song is not merely celebratory: “by singing this song at this specific site, Israel denoted its legal claim to the right of ownership of the territory concerned.” In my view, it would be more accurate to say that the song serves as a witness/record (cf. Deut. 31:19, 21) to/of the legal ceremony (cf. Gen. 21:30) that established a claim to ownership of the well (cf. 21:25) or the water (cf. 26:20) and the right of way to it. The legal ceremony for staking the claim will be discussed below.

HYDROLOGY: WATER AND WADI

Before discussing the rest of the Song of the Well, we need to examine the hydrology of wadis. We begin with the Negev:

Since rainfall is meager and erratic in the desert, the first question that arises is how underground water is created in a desert area . . . The local source is floodwater seeping through the gravel beds in the wadis during and immediately after local floods . . .

The gravel beds are relatively permeable and as the floodwater infiltrates downward it fills the free spaces between the gravel stones and sand grains. Since the gravel wadi beds in the Negev usually overlie a less permeable limestone formation, the water that infiltrates downward remains underground and becomes a perched water table with the gravel bed as the aquifer. The wadis usually have a fairly steep slope (about 1–3 percent) and this underground perched water flows slowly downstream. If one digs a hole into the wadi bed and reaches this water table he finds water. If he empties this hole of water he will also discover that the water is replenished or recharged into the hole after some time . . .

In Moab, too, we find subterranean streams, often flowing beneath the wadi beds:

Against the western slope of the highland springs are numerous. The rainwater, which falls on the highland, filters through the porous limestone to the watertight layers, whence it flows westward along subterranean watercourses only to reach the ground surface in the dales . . .

Precipitation is readily absorbed through surface marls and limestone and transported horizontally, forming underground channels . . . This water emerges in the form of springs in the wadi bottoms . . .

In both regions, the best time to find water in the seemingly dry bed of a wadi is after a storm. Torrential rainstorms create flash floods that sweep down the wadis. Even after the puddles have dried up, desert nomads and desert animals dig down ca. 20–40 centimeters to reach the perched water beneath the gravel bed of the wadi; cf. וַיַּחְפְּרוּ עַבְדֵי־יִצְחָק בַּנָּחַל וַיִּמְצְאוּ־שָׁם בְּאֵר מַיִם חַיִּים, “Isaac’s servants dug in the wadi and found there a well of flowing (lit. living) water” (Gen. 26:19). In some spots, the perched water table comes so close to the

73. Evenari, Negev, 150.
74. Zyl, Moabites, 54.
76. Evenari, Negev, 151–53.
surface that a spring gushes out onto the bed; cf. "יִשְׁבַּה הַמְשַׁלֵּחַ מַעְיָנִים בַּנְּחָלִים בֵּין הָרִים;" (Ps. 104:10). However, in reading the following section, one should keep in mind that most wadis are ephemeral, not a dependable source of water; cf. "אַחַי בָּגְדוּ כָּמוֹ־נָחַל כַּאֲפִיק נְחָלִים יַעֲבֹרוּ" (Job 6:15; cf. Jer. 15:18 and Joel 1:20).

This description of the well is problematic, as noted by Noth: “That nobles actually dug a well with the staves which they carried as signs of their power is difficult to accept.”77 Eryl Davies provides more detail: “It is most unlikely that the leaders of the nation would have been engaged in such a laborious activity; moreover, the instruments which they carried (the sceptre and staves) can hardly have been regarded as suitable implements for digging a well.”78 In other words, both the workers and the tools are anomalous.79 A third problem is pointed out by Karl Budde. According to him, the description above (v. 18) contradicts לְמֹשֶׁה אֱסֹף אֶת־הָעָם וְאֶתְּנָה לָהֶם מָיִם (v. 16), since the latter seems to hint at some unusual provision of water while v. 18 appears to speak of the ordinary method of obtaining water, viz., by digging a well.80

These three problems disappear once we recognize that the chieftains never had any intention of digging a well on their own and never anticipated striking water with their staffs. The insertion of their staffs, the scepters symbolizing their authority,81 into the (seemingly dry) bed of the wadi was intended as a kind of groundbreaking ceremony to mark the initiation of a well-digging project82 and as a kind of flag-planting or claim-staking ceremony to establish ownership of any water that might be discovered.83 They had planned to have others do the actual excavation work following the ceremony. However, something quite unexpected occurred: the ceremony was all that was needed. The Lord had provided water by selecting

77. Noth, Numbers, 160.
79. Joseph Bekhor Shor (בכור, פירושי רבי יוסף בתורה) notes the same two anomalies. Normally, he says, wells are dug by servants (as in Gen. 26:19) using a spade (מרא) and a mattock (פסל). For him, however, these anomalies are not problems but evidence of the extraordinary nature of the well. See immediately below.
81. See above and cf. the reference to נְבָרֵי נַחַל הָשָׁרְרוֹת in בכור, פירושי רבי יוסף בתורה, 280 to Num. 21:18.
82. So, too, Theodor H. Gaster, Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament (Gloucester, MA: Smith, 1981), 302: “The digging of the well is often ceremoniously inaugurated by the sheikh or headman, and it is to this, undoubtedly, that the words of our song refer.” Oddly enough, Budde (“Noch etwas,” 495 = idem, “Song,” 140), too, views digging with staffs as a “symbolic act, such as is still practiced with us, at the laying of the corner-stone or capstone of a building, in the first spade stroke for a canal, or the last stroke in cutting a canal, or even the handful of earth thrown on the coffin of a relative or friend.” That view would ordinarily resolve the alleged contradiction between vv. 16 and 18, but Budde undermines this resolution by assuming that the symbolic act of the chieftains was performed after the well was dug: “The well, after being found and dug, was lightly covered over or stopped up, so that the scepters of the sheikhs could remove the obstruction, and thus they became implements for digging” (“Noch etwas,” 495 = idem, “Song,” 139). This oft-cited assumption is rightly rejected by Holzinger, Numeri, 97; and Shmuel Aḥituv, in Isaac Leo Seeligmann Volume, ed. Alexander Rofé and Yair Zakovitch (Jerusalem: Rubinstein, 1983), 1: 59–60.
83. This legal ceremony is memorialized by the song; see above.
a spot where no digging was required—presumably a spot where the underground layer of stone, with its stream of perched water, was very close to the surface. In the words of Clyde Woods and Justin Rogers: “The song in verses 17 and 18 celebrates provision of water in the wilderness, this time through divinely directed discovery of a bountiful well-site (cf. Gen. 21:19). In an area where water lay just below the dry surface, the leaders (princes ... nobles), obediently and symbolically beginning the diggings with scepters and staffs, struck water, to the amazement of the people.” This is probably what Abraham Ibn Ezra had in mind when he wrote: “This well was also a wonder (יפה). It is not the well called ‘Miriam’s well’, in my opinion, but rather a place where, at Moses’s command, the chieftains dig with their staffs and immediately the water flowed forth (に対ời וה плот שבעה נ bd הים).”

ETHNOGRAPHY: A BEDOUIN PARALLEL TO THE SONG OF THE WELL

Support for the notion that the original plan called for a two-step procedure—the insertion of staffs followed by the actual excavation work—comes from the ethnographic research of Alois Musil. Here is his description of the procedure for digging wells in Transjordan a century ago: “At suitable spots, after breaking up the earth with staffs, the Bedouins take out the stones with their hands, thereby creating larger openings, up to two meters wide, in which the water gathers . . . Although the chiefs seldom lend a hand, it is always said that Sheikh or Prince so-and-so dug this well.” He adds that each tent had its own well. We should probably assume that the staffs used to break up the earth next to each tent belonged to the head of the family in that tent.

The importance of this Bedouin parallel is greatly enhanced by Musil’s publication of a song sung a century ago by Bedouins (the Beni Ṣakhr = Dahamsheh tribe in Transjordan) while watering their camels. Most of the song deals with the camels but the first three couplets deal mainly with the well from which the men are drawing water:

| Saudak allâh jâ bir | May Allah cause you to drink, O well, |
| min al-wabel šahâtîr | boatloads [lit. barges] of pouring rain. |
| Ebher jâ ma’ | Become as wide as the sea, O water, |

85. Clyde M. Woods and Justin M. Rogers, Leviticus and Numbers (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2006), 313. Cf. Jacob Licht, יִירָשָׁתָן לְמַשׁ מֶסֶר מִצָּר (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985–1995), 2: 230: “this well came to them not through the use of real work tools and not through toil, but through ceremonial—and almost symbolic—digging.”
86. This version of Ibn Ezra’s comment on Num. 21:16 is from מַלְקוּتظ רַגְלוֹת מוֹתֵר: מַשְׂרֵה מֶסֶר, ed. Menachem Cohen (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan Univ., 2011), 141 s.v.
87. Musil, “Miszellen,” 5–6. In Gen. 21:30, Abraham is able to assert, in the first person singular, “I dug this well”—even though the actual digging was presumably done by servants (cf. Gen. 26:19)—either because he performed the groundbreaking/claim-staking ceremony or because he commanded his servants to do the work; for the latter possibility, see Richard C. Steiner, A Biblical Translation in the Making: The Evolution and Impact of Saadia Gaon’s Tafsir (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ., Center for Jewish Studies, 2010), 123–24.
90. This rendering is more faithful to the Arabic than Musil’s mit Regen in Hülle und Fülle.
91. For this rendering, see Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon, 156b s.v. bahura. The section assigning this meaning to the first form is easy to miss, which may explain Theodor Nöldeke’s hesitation in ZDMG 61 (1907): 232 n. 2 (review of Alois Musil, Ḳusejir ‘Amra). Musil’s German gloss, quill, “gush!”, is less faithful to the Arabic original. Even less faithful to the Arabic is the mysterious rendering of imperative quill (changed to quelle auf in “Miszellen,” 5) with the noun “wood”—a rendering given by many English-speaking Bible scholars (including Milgrom).
Musil pointed out the similarity between this Bedouin well song and the biblical one. Indeed, he asserted that the singing of both songs took place in W. eṯ-Ṯemed.93 Theodor Nöldeke, too, was impressed by what he described as “the almost word-for-word similarity.”94 Many recent scholars have followed in their footsteps. One similarity is that the well is addressed, with the noun bīr < biʾr = בְּאֵר appearing in the vocative. Its water (or, by synecdoche, it itself) is commanded to rise from the underground water table onto the wadi bed. Another similarity, according to the reading proposed here, is that both the Bedouin song and the poetic prelude to the biblical song allude to the rainstorms (al-wabel = סוּפָה) that supply the well with its water. The third and most important similarity is the appearance of a formula meaning “X dug (ḥ-p / f-r) it with (bi-) a staff”: bikadīben ḥâferînu = חֲפָרוּהָ ... בִּמְחֹקֵק. This portion of the two songs memorializes the legal ceremony that established a claim to ownership of a well and its water. The millennia-long preservation of the associated legal formula in the same general area must be attributed to its life-and-death significance for the desert nomads who roamed there.

This phrase is ambiguous, and the ambiguity has given rise to controversy. In my view, the controversy can be resolved by recognizing that the phrase is at the center of a clever word play. In the primary reading of the phrase, Hebrew מַתָּנָה is a common noun, and the phrase is part of—indeed, the conclusion of—the Song of the Well. In that reading, it implies that the well was a gift from the desert. This is, more or less, the reading of the targums.96 According to them, the phrase is elliptical, with an understood נִתְּנָה, yielding “and from the desert, a gift was given” or (most clearly in the case of Pseudo-Jonathan) “and from the desert, it (= the well) was given as a gift.” They are followed by Numbers Rabba (19, 26), and many medieval Jewish exegetes.

By the time we reach the next phrase, מִמִּדְבָּר מַתָּנָה, a secondary reading of מַתָּנָה becomes apparent, viz., “and from the desert, (come) to Mattanah.” In that reading מַתָּנָה is a

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92. Musil’s symbol ṭ is equivalent to modern ḡ; see, for example, in fig. 4 below. Nöldeke alters ēṛdi to ēgdį in his review of Ḳuṣejr ʿAmra, 232 with n. 3. Unaware of this, Driver (“Geographical Problems,” 17*) misinterprets the verb.

93. See, for example, his remarks in Anzeiger der kaiserlichen Akademie des Wissenschaften (in Wien); Philosophisch-historische Klasse 40 (1903): 44; and his description (Arabia Petraea, vol. 1, 297; and “Miszellen,” 5) of the underground stream flowing .3 meter to 1 meter below the surface of W. eṯ-Ṯemed. Others who believe W. eṯ-Ṯemed to be the site of the biblical well include Nelson Glueck, “Explorations in Eastern Palestine, I,” AASOR 14 (1933–1934): 13; E. D. Grohman, “Beer,” IDB 1: 374b; and Arthur J. Ferch, “Beer,” ABD 1: 640a. However, the context suggests that the well was located in a tributary of Naḥal Arnon that formed the northern border of Moab.


95. Among the modern scholars who have adopted this reading are Budde, “Noch etwas,” 497–98 = idem, “Song,” 141–42; Baentsch, Exodus-Leviticus-Numeri, 580; Smith, “Early Poetry,” 64; Milgrom, Numbers, 178; Cole, Numbers, 355; and NEB. Budde (to whom modern scholars attribute this interpretation) tied this interpretation to two departures from MT, and some scholars have rejected his interpretation for that reason; see Philip J. Budd, Numbers (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 237; R. K. Harrison, Numbers: An Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 282; Ashley, Numbers, 407 n. 8; Davies, Numbers, 222. The interpretation of the context proposed here eliminates the problems that Budde’s emendations were designed to solve.

toponym, the understood verb is the imperative תָּא, “come,” and והמְדַבְּרָה מְתָנָה is not part of the Song of the Well. It is, rather, a resumptive repetition of והמְדַבְּרָה בָּאָרָה מַתָּנָה, “and from there, (the confluence at Mt. Waheb in the desert, come) to a/the well (named Mattanah).”

This secondary reading did not arise by accident. It seems clear that והמְדַבְּרָה מְתָנָה has been carefully formulated to make it match the structure of the following phrases, viz., “from GN1 (to) GN2.” The result is Janus parallelism, with והמְדַבְּרָה מְתָנָה functioning as the pivot between the Song of the Well and the matrix poem in which it is embedded.

A few exegetes have wondered about the syntax of והמְדַבְּרָה מְתָנָה in the primary reading. Nahmanides cites Onqelos and adds: “It is an elliptical expression (of the kind) that occurs in songs/poems (לְשׁוֹן קָצֶר יָבוּא בְּשָׁר יָדוּ).” 98 Jacob Licht, by contrast, finds the syntax assumed by Onqelos “very strange.” 99 Licht’s assertion is too vague to evaluate, but it should be stated that Onqelos’s rendering need not be treated as a precise syntactic analysis. Underlying structures that reflect a similar meaning should also be considered. For example, the phrase may be elliptical for והמְדַבְּרָה בָּאָרָה מְתָנָה, “from the desert, a gift emerged,” as in והמְדַבְּרָה בָּאָרָה מְתָנָה, “from the strong, something sweet emerged” (Judg. 14:14).

Another possibility would be to take והמְדַבְּרָה מְתָנָה not as an elliptical clause but as a noun phrase—a noun phrase whose structure and word order (with the indefinite head noun last) is similar to that of Punic והמְדַבְּרָה לעבל מתנה, “a gift for the lord, Baal.” 100 In that case, it would mean “a gift from the desert” (as translated above), and it would stand in apposition to the preceding noun phrase, והמְדַבְּרָה בָּאָרָה מְתָנָה. The conjunction -ו is not an insurmountable obstacle to this analysis. That conjunction can connect an appositive with its head, in which case it is traditionally known as a waw explicativum. 101 In any event, since והמְדַבְּרָה מְתָנָה has been formulated deliberately to make it match the structure and word order of the following phrases, any deviation from normal syntax can be attributed to poetic license.

The targumic view that the first component of חֲפָרָה שָׂרִים כָּרוּהָ נְדִיבֵי הָעָם בִּמְחֹקֵק בְּמִשְׁעֲנֹתָם 102 is the Hebrew word for wadi has been widely accepted in modern times. 103 It has been suggested that Targum Neofiti and Aquila go a step further, reading חֲפָרָה שָׂרִים כָּרוּהָ נְדִיבֵי הָעָם בִּמְחֹקֵק בְּמִשְׁעֲנֹתָם בהנהליאל. 104 Part of this suggestion has been developed by Jacob Milgrom: “Targum Neofiti renders ‘swelling torrents,’ taking the second element ‘el


98. Ramban, פירושי התורה א, 2: 284 l. 23.
100. KAI 99 l. 1.
102. For an uncertain epigraphic parallel to this toponym, see Martin Heide, ‘‘One Sack for a Beqa’ of Jerusalem’: A Puzzling Ostracoon from the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection,” in Shlomo—Studies in Epigraphy, Iconography, History and Archaeology in Honor of Shlomo Moussaieff, ed. Robert Deutsch (Tel Aviv: Archaeological Center, 2003), 111–13. I am indebted to Shmuel Ahituv for this reference.
104. J. de Vaux, Les nombres (Paris: Gabalda, 1972), 240. Their renderings are לְחָלִיאל and εἰς χειμάρρους ἰσχυρῶν, respectively.
not as 'God' but as the adjective 'mighty (wadis)' (see harerei ’el, ‘mighty mountains’; Ps. 36:7), an apt description of the terrain north of the Arnon where Israel was encamped.\footnote{105}

This interpretation does not require revocalization of נחלי to נחלי. It seems likely that נחלי is derived from a Canaanite dialect that, like Phoenician and Northern Hebrew, contracted unstressed *ay to i (but stressed *ay to ʾ).\footnote{106} This assumption is supported by the vocalization of 1) מְנֶבָי < *Daybān,\footnote{107} occurring eleven verses after נחלי; and perhaps also 2) מְנֶבָי < *Sayhān?\footnote{108} occurring two verses after נחלי; and 3) מְנֶבָי, derived from מִנְבָי, “face.” If so, נחלי is derived from a dialectal variant of נחלי,\footnote{109} which, in turn, is a poetic expression comparable to נחלי נבּ (Ps. 36:7) and נחלי נבּ (Ps. 80:11). Just as the two latter phrases refer to mighty mountains and mighty cedars (of Lebanon), respectively, so too נחלי appears to be derived from a phrase referring to mighty canyons.\footnote{110}

This toponym probably refers to an area near the Dead Sea, since that is where the Transjordanian wadis turn into breathtaking canyons. If the Israelites followed the route of נחלי (W. es-Saʿideh to W. eṣ-Ṣ(u)fei to W. el-Mōjeb/Mūjib, the Arnon proper) in traveling from Mt. Waheb in the Desert of Kedemoth (at the eastern border of Sihon’s kingdom) to the Steppes of Moab (at the western border), they would eventually have reached the confluence of W. el-Mōjeb/Mūjib with W. el-Heidān,\footnote{111} ca. 35 km from the Dead Sea, in a beautiful scenic area called el-Malāqī. The latter, where two “mighty canyons” meet, is one possibility for the location of נחלי.
This toponym, known only from Moab, is frequently attested there.\textsuperscript{112} Judging from the next two toponyms, this Bamoth is probably the one associated with Balaam, viz., Bamoth-baal (Num. 22:41).\textsuperscript{113}

This valley, mentioned \textit{immediately before} הַגַּיְא in our excerpt, must be “the valley (גִּיא) in front of Beth-peor,” mentioned \textit{two verses after} רֹאשׁ הַפִּסְגָּה in Deut. 3:27–29. Beth-peor was presumably the temple of Baal, or its location, on/at Mt. Peor, near the valley where the Israelites were encamped when 1) Balak tried to have them cursed from Mt. Peor (Num. 23:28); and 2) an Israelite chieftain was enticed by a Midianite princess to participate in the cult of Baal Peor (25:3–18). The account of 2) seems to contain the main ingredients of the sacred marriage ceremony described at length in Papyrus Amherst 63;\textsuperscript{114} sexual union in a sacred bridal chamber (הַמָּקָה) erected on a sacred height (רֹאשׁ הַפְּעוֹר) in a sacred grove (כְּסֶרֶס, “in the [grove of] acacias” or “in Shittim,” a place named after such a grove). This interpretation assumes, of course, that a) Σαττείν . . . παράκειται τῷ ὄρει Φογώρ, “Shittim . . . lies next to Mt. Peor”;\textsuperscript{115} and b) the events described in 2) took place during a New Year’s festival.

It has been noted that the list of sites in Num. 21:10–20 “ends with three locations which are all linked to the setting of the following stories of Balaam.”\textsuperscript{116} This observation deals with the \textit{geographic} ties to the Balaam pericope, but ignores the \textit{literary} link, which is even stronger. The poetic phrase רֹאשׁ הַפִּסְגָּה וְנִשְׁקָפָה עַל־פְּנֵי הַיְשִׁימֹן, “the top of Pisgah, overlooking the wasteland” (21:19), has a prosaic counterpart in רֹאשׁ הַפְּעוֹר הַנִּשְׁקָף עַל־פְּנֵי הַיְשִׁימֹן, “the top of Peor, overlooking the wasteland” (23:28). If so, נִשְׁקָפָה עַל־פְּנֵי הַיְשִׁימֹן is a kind of relative clause—an attributive modifier of רֹאשׁ הַפְּעֻגָּה just as נִשְׁקָפָה עַל־פְּנֵי הַיְשִׁימֹן is an attributive modifier of רֹאשׁ הַפְּעוֹר. The conjunction -ו functions here as it does in וְרֹאשׁוֹ בַשָּׁמַיִם “and a tower whose top is in the sky” (Gen. 11:4), where -ו is an attributive modifier of מִגְדָּל.

The similarity between the two phrases, which appear only two chapters apart in Numbers, is very striking. It calls attention to the fact that our excerpt ends with sites—at the western border of Sihon’s kingdom—related to the Lord’s conflicts with Balak and the five Midianite rulers.

WAHEB AND ITS WADIS

The discussion thus far suggests that our excerpt is more intelligible, linguistically and geographically, than scholars have thought. We can go even further with the help of

\textsuperscript{112} Milgrom, \textit{Numbers}, 178.


\textsuperscript{114} Richard C. Steiner and Charles F. Nims, “The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script: Text, Translation, and Notes” (published online, 2017), XI/1–3, XVI/7–19, XVIII/1–3, and passim. See https://repository.yu.edu/handle/20.500.12202/51.

\textsuperscript{115} Eusebius, \textit{Onomasticon}, ed. R. Steven Notley and Zev Safrai (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 144.

\textsuperscript{116} Frevel, “Understanding,” 132.

\textsuperscript{117} See Steiner, “Biblical Hebrew Conjunction,” 265.
a suggestion made by David Ben-Gad Hacohen. The latter identifies 1) וָהֵב with Khirbet el-M(u)deyyeneh es-Sāliyeh, the ruins of a town built on top of a mountain located at the juncture of W. Saʿīdeh and W. Sāliyeh, two tributary wadis of the Arnon; and 2) עָר with the region just inside the northeast corner of Moab. However, given the uncertainty surrounding the date of the earliest settlement on that mountain, it is safer to assume that Waheb is the name of the mountain itself, just as Arabic Wāhib is the name of a mountain further south.

Fig. 1. Taken from David Ben-Gad Hacohen, 'וָהֵב בְּסוּפָה' ו'שֶׁבֶת עָר Cathedra 95 (2000): 11.
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118. These ruins were identified as Khirbet el-M(u)deyyeneh, “ruin of the little city,” by Alois Musil, the first European scholar to visit them, but this identification is not particularly helpful, since there are numerous sites with that name; see J. Maxwell Miller, “Six Khirbet el-Medeinehs in the Region East of the Dead Sea,” BASOR 276 (Nov. 1989): 25–28 (esp. p. 25). More recent scholars have added Sāliyeh to the name; see Chang-Ho C. Ji and Jong-Keun Lee, “Preliminary Report on the Survey of the Dhībān Plateau, 1997,” *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 42 (1998): 556–58 (Khirbat al-Mdayyneh as-Sāliyeh); and Israel Finkelstein and Oded Lipschits, “The Genesis of Moab: A Proposal,” *Levant* 43 (2011): 144 (Khirbet Medeineh Saliyeh). For a suggestion that el-M(u)deyyeneh may derive from Midyān, see Chaim Ben David, “The Mudayna Sites of the Arnon Tributaries: ‘Midian alongside Moab’?,” *Antiguo Oriente* 15 (2017): 149–73 (with photos by Gilead Peli). Although the y in M(u)deyyeneh < mādīyin(ah) is a normal component of the Arabic diminutive pattern fuʿayl, it is not impossible that Midyān was reinterpreted as an Arabic diminutive of madīnah through a folk etymology.


120. Finkelstein and Lipschits, “Genesis of Moab,” 144.

121. See fig. 2.
The precise number of Arnon tributary wadis at el-M(u)dyyeneh es-Sāliyeh is controversial, as is their precise configuration. Nevertheless, several points seem clear:

122. The early reports speak of only two wadis; see Musil, Arabia Petraea, 1: 328 fig. 151 (site plan), 329; idem, Kusejr ʿAmra, Karte von Arabia Petraea; and Nelson Glueck, “Explorations, I,” 36. It is puzzling, however, that Musil’s description of the configuration of the two wadis seems to contradict the site plan he gives one page ear-
Fig. 4. Excerpt, taken from Alois Musil, *Ḳuṣejr ʿAmra, Karte von Arabia Petraea*, http://mapy.vkol.cz/mapy/v61955_002.htm

Fig. 5. Excerpt, taken from Hermann Wahle, *Palästina: Historisch-archäologische Karte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), Blatt Süd, G10. Scanned by Shulamith Berger; reprinted with permission
1) the mountain is surrounded on at least three sides by at least two wadis: W. Saʿīdeh and W. Sāliyeh; 2) if there are additional wadis next to the mountain, they are tributaries of these two; 3) virtually all of the rainwater that runs off and through the mountain ends up at the confluence of these two wadis.

If Hacohen’s identification of וָהֵב is correct, the phrase אֶשֶׁד הַנְּחָלִים must refer to the confluence of W. Saʿīdeh and W. Sāliyeh, including 1) the spot at the foot of the mountain where, during and after a rainstorm, the torrent of the latter wadi pours into the torrent of the former, and 2) the combined torrent that flows from that spot.123

A few kilometers to the west of that point there is a spring called ʿAin es-Saʿīdeh, “Spring of the Joyous One (fem.).”124 From that point westward, Musil reports, W. Saʿīdeh always has water.125 Musil’s report implies that, east of the spring, W. Saʿīdeh gives the appearance of being completely dried up during the summer, but that appearance is, no doubt, deceiving. The presence of a spring would seem to indicate that W. Saʿīdeh has a stream running underground, on a layer of stone, for at least part of the year. The well of the chieftains would have been located in that wadi, at a spot—west of the mountain—where the underground stream would be just below the surface following the kind of torrential rainstorm (סוּפָה) mentioned in the poem.

This analysis explains the verbal connection between the well called הַנְּחָל and the nearby mountain called וָהֵב, “giver.” The former was fed by the water that ran down and trickled through the latter during and after every rainstorm. If so, our verse is reminiscent of Herodotus (2.5): “The Egypt to which the Greeks sail [= the Delta] is land acquired by the Egyptians and a gift of the river (δῶρον τοῦ ποταμοῦ).”126 In both cases, the raw material for one topographical feature is supplied by another topographical feature as a “gift.” A mountain supplies water for a well, and a river supplies silt for a delta. This analysis does not contradict מַתָּנָה a gift from the desert because Mt.Waheb (unlike the well?) was located in the desert.

WAHEB AND THE DESERT OF KEDEMOTH

Hacohen’s identification of וָהֵב (modified as proposed here or not) fits perfectly with the location of the station described immediately before it in Num. 21:13: מַתָּנָה אֵשֶׁד הַנְּחָלִים וָהֵב, “across the Arnon, in the desert that juts out from the (eastern) border of the Amorites.” Moreover, it fits perfectly with the prevailing identification of מַתָּנָה.
the place from which Moses sent emissaries to Sihon (Deut. 2:26). Since many deserts in the
Bible are named after adjacent towns (e.g., מֶדְבֶּר נַעֲבָד, Medeber Na'am, etc.), it seems clear that מֶדְבֶּר קְדֵמִים
takes its name from the town of קְדֵמִים (Josh. 13:18, 1 Chr. 6:64). That town, whose name means “eastern parts,” is often identified with modern Khirbet es-Sāliyeh,127 which is situated “right on the western edge” of the desert128 and around five kilometers north northwest of Khirbet el-M(u)deyyeneh es-Sāliyeh.129 According to this reconstruction, Mt. Waheb is located in the southwestern corner of the Desert of Kedemoth. The latter (probably part of the Syrian Desert) is the desert alluded to in the phrases מֹדֶבֶר קְדֵמִים and and מַדְבֶּר קְדֵמִים.

Further support for Hacohen’s theory comes from Israel Ephʿal’s discussion of the Hebrew
ethnonym נֵי־קֶדֶם and the Egyptian toponym Qdm, attested in the story of Sinuhe (Middle
Kingdom):

[Qdm] refers to a region on the western border of the Syrian desert . . . . The prophetic litera-
ture tends to use the term People of the East rather than the term “Arabs” in reference
to the nomads of the Syro-Arabian desert . . . .130

According to the Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae, there is a second occurrence of the topon-
ynom Qdm in a Middle Kingdom inscription.131 There it has the plural sign, paralleling the
plural ending of מַדְבֶּר קְדֵמִים.

All of this suggests that 1) Egyptian Qedem, “the region on the western border of the
Syrian desert,” included מֶדְבֶּר קְדֵמִים מַדְבֶּר קְדֵמִים; and 2) מֶדְבֶּר קְדֵמִים was inhabited by at least
some of whom spoke an ANA dialect. Thus, if מֶדְבֶּר קְדֵמִים was in מַדְבֶּר קְדֵמִים, it is easy to explain
why מֶדְבֶּר קְדֵמִים has an ANA name, exhibiting no shift from ă to ő or from initial w to y.132

In a recently published ANA inscription from Bāyir, a remote desert site in southeast-
ern Jordan not terribly distant from Waheb, we find the author asking Milkom, Kemosh,
and Qaws to protect his cisterns/reservoir.133 The inscription, which invokes the gods of
Ammon, Moab, and Edom and switches to the Canaanite script at the end, sheds light upon
the cultural and religious ties binding North-Arabian-speaking denizens of Qedem to their
Northwest-Semitic-speaking neighbors. The editors date the text to the first century bce, but
they do not explain the basis for this dating.

127. Zyl, Moabites, 74–75; John L. Peterson, “A Topographical Surface Survey of the Levitical ‘Cities’ of
Joshua 21 and 1 Chronicles 6” (diss., Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1977), 671–86; idem, “Kedemoth,”
ABD 4: 10–11; Robert G. Boling, “Levitical Cities: Archaeology and Texts,” in Studies . . . Samuel Iwry, 25; Dear-
Hacohen, קְדֵמִים, 16.
129. See Ji and Lee, “Preliminary Report,” 557; Glueck, “Explorations, I,” 36; and Figs. 1, 4, and 5 above.
130. Ephʿal, Ancient Arabs, 10.
131. For a different reading, see John Coleman Darnell, “The Eleventh Dynasty Royal Inscription from Deir
132. Another possibility is that the name Waheb originated with Midianites. For the view that there were Mid-
ianites in the Syrian Desert east of Moab, see G. M. Landes, “Midian,” IDB 3: 375a; Yehudah Elitzur and Yehuda
Kiel, אטלס דעת מקרא (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1998), 99; and Ben David, “Mudayna Sites.”
133. Hani Hayajneh et al., “Die Götter von Ammon, Moab und Edom in einer neuen frühnordarabischen
Inschrift aus Südost-Jordanien,” in Fünftes Treffen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Semitistik in der Deutschen Morgenlän-
dischen Gesellschaft, ed. V. Golinets et al. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2015), 79–105.
ANCIENT TOURISM

The similarity between “On account of that, it is said in the Book of the Wars of the Lord, ‘Come to (Mt.) Waheb’” and “On account of that, the bards say, ‘Come to Heshbon’” calls for an explanation. It appears that the ancient bards, when recounting the history of a people, would urge their audiences, present and future, to visit sites that are central to that history. Numbers 21 contains two excerpts that begin with exhortations of the form “Come to GN.”

Similar exhortations are issued by the prophets, in prose or (more often) poetry, on behalf of the Lord. In several cases, the audience is urged to go on a fact-finding trip: “Go to my place at Shiloh, where I formerly caused my name to dwell, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people, Israel” (Jer. 7:12); “Cross over to the isles of the Kittim and see, send to Kedar and observe carefully; see if anything like this has ever happened” (Jer. 2:10); “Cross over to Calneh and see, go from there to Great Hamath, and go down to Gath of the Philistines: Are they better than these kingdoms (Israel and Judah)?” (Amos 6:2). In one instance, they are urged to make a pilgrimage: “Come to Bethel and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression” (Amos 4:4). Here, in an appeal dripping with sarcasm, pilgrimage to the shrines of northern Israel is portrayed as a kind of vice tourism. In these examples, too, the exhortation begins with the imperative of a verb of motion (“go,” “come,” “cross over”) followed immediately by the name of a destination serving, in the poetic examples, as the direct object of the verb.

What was the Israelite audience supposed to see and feel at the sites mentioned in Num. 21:14–20? For a general answer, we may turn to an exhortation, attested twice in Psalms (with minor variations), that partially resembles the exhortations discussed above: “Go (and) see the works of the Lord/God” (46:9, 66:5).

A more specific answer is available for the toponyms connected with Balak: “remember what Balak plotted . . . in order to (come to) know the righteous acts of the Lord” (Mic. 6:5). In Josh. 24:9, the verb הָכַּלָּמָה is used of Balak’s plot, proving that the latter is worthy of mention among מִלְחֲמֹת ה יִשְׂרָאֵל.

The “mighty canyons” near the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, major tourist attractions to this day, demonstrate the Lord’s awesome power with no obvious connection to war. The feelings that they were supposed to evoke are expressed by Baruch Levine:

After visiting Nahal Zered and Nahal Yabboq on a trip to Jordan, I realized that these were both great gorges, mighty canyons that are overpowering in their height, depth and massiveness, whereas the actual streams that run through them are small and unremarkable. Crossing them on the ground was and remains to this day a formidable feat. Accordingly, I decided to change my translation of Hebrew פֶּלְשִׁים to “gorge” in these cases, so as to convey the sense of wonderment that I had experienced.
Fig. 6. Naḥal Arnon near the Dead Sea. Photo courtesy of Kaiti Fasburg
(https://birdsoftheairtravel.com)
At the beginning of our excerpt, each member of the audience is urged to come during a storm to Mt. Waheb and the Arnon tributary wadis around it. We can perhaps imagine the impression left upon an ancient visitor by such an experience with the help of an inscription of Sargon II, which tells of crossing mountains “into which gullies of torrential water (natbakāt mê dannūti) were carved, the roar of whose rushing water resounded like thunder for one double mile around.” Similarly, Israelite visitors who stood on or near Mt. Waheb during a torrential downpour would have seen the clash of raging torrents at the confluence next to it and heard a thunderous roar, as described in Isa. 29:6. They would no doubt have found the experience awe-inspiring, a manifestation of the Lord’s terrible might. They might even have recalled the description in the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5:21; cf. Ps. 83:10, 16) of a flash flood in Wadi Kishon sweeping away their enemies.

At first glance, it is tempting to compare a visit to the confluence of the wadis at Mt. Waheb with pilgrimages to river confluences in ancient India. However, there are numerous differences. One of them is that, in India, confluences were (and still are) considered sacred—not merely awe-inspiring. Thus, “in the list of sacred sites enumerated in the Mahābhārata, river confluences (sangama) are constantly mentioned. Among them, the most important is the confluence between the Gangā and the Yamunā.” This confluence, located at modern Allahabad, “seems to be referred to in one of the verses of the Rig Veda, which says, ‘Those who bathe at the place where the two rivers, white and dark, flow together, rise up to heaven’ (Rig Veda X.75 [khila, supplementary verse]).” By contrast, there is no reason to believe that the confluence of the wadis was considered sacred by the Israelites or that a visit by Israelites to the confluence of the wadis would be viewed as a religious pilgrimage. In that respect, at least, it was closer to modern sightseeing at river confluences and, more generally, to ancient Greek sightseeing, as described and practiced by Herodotus.

As for the well of the chieftains, it, too, was out of the ordinary. This is implicit not only in v. 16 but also in v. 18. The well, located in a spot selected by the Lord, did not require digging by laborers. It yielded water during the groundbreaking, claim-staking ceremony—a ceremony performed by chieftains with the ancient equivalent of scepters. Our study has shown that this well, which provided water to the Israelites during the time of the Lord’s wars with Sihon and Og, is presented in Num. 21 as a sight well worth seeing. As such, it is reminiscent of the well of Ramesses II celebrated in the Quban Stela and the Aksha Inscription. That well, too—having been dug in a spot selected by the king and having saved the
king’s servants from dying of thirst in a terrible desert—was remarkable enough to attract sightseers: “Those who were distant [. . .] came to see the well [created by] the Ruler.”[^144] Thus, there is a clear parallel between this Egyptian “well [created by] the Ruler” and the Israelite “well that the chieftains dug.” The significance of this parallel will be discussed in another place.

### CONCLUSIONS

The excerpt from the Book of the Wars of the Lord in Num. 21 is longer than generally believed (vv. 14b–20) and far more intelligible. Contrary to the views of many, it makes excellent sense, both linguistically and geographically. The key to its decipherment is the realization that נְחָי in the excerpt is a verb masquerading as a preposition. It is easily construed, without the slightest change, as an apocopated or biliteral imperative of א-ת-י meaning “come!” belonging to the archaic poetic dialect of Hebrew.

This construal of נְחָי transforms our understanding of Num. 21:14–20 in many ways. For example, it reveals that עליך אימר היך לעしておく, thirteen verses later. This parallel and others make possible a new, more coherent reading of the entire excerpt. The latter is a poetic exhortation to relive the Lord’s wonders by touring inspiring sites. All of the sites are in Sihon’s kingdom, and most are related to the Lord’s wars. The first group (vv. 14–18) is at the eastern border of the kingdom, in and around the Desert of Kedemoth, where the Israelites were encamped during the Lord’s wars with Sihon and Og. The last group (vv. 19–20) is at the western border, in and around the Steppes of Moab, where the Israelites were encamped during the conflicts with Balak and the five Midianite rulers.

*It is a source of profound regret to me that my brother, Professor Mark Steiner did not live to see the final version of this study. He began circulating it long before it was complete (as I later learned from Josef Stern), and he helped me obtain a crucial reprint permission for it just days before he was hospitalized with COVID-19.*

[^144]: Ibid., 193.