

Caravan Routes Between Egypt and Nabataea and the Voyage of Sultan Baibars to Petra in 1276

Caravan routes and sea lanes were the arteries of economic interchange in the Ancient East. At the same time, they became channels of religious and cultural communication between the different civilisations of the world, since pilgrims to Mount Moses in the Sinai or the holy cities of Islam followed the open tracks of the desert. Invading armies had to cross the trade routes where water supplies were available. There is no doubt that the Nabataean caravaneer traversed the roads of the Sinai desert and Arabia to convey the bitumen of the Dead Sea, the aromatic plants of Hadramaut, the spices of India together with the silk of China towards Egypt and the Mediterranean basin. Because the Arabs were producers and distributors of this valuable merchandise, they were able to accumulate large revenues. Augustus, who was aware of the wealth of Arabia Felix, mounted, in 24 BC, an expedition to this country under the command of Aelius Gallus, procurator of Egypt¹. The Roman Army, reinforced by 1,000 Nabataeans, led by Syllaeus, Minister of Obodas II (30–9 BC), crossed the Red Sea at the port of Myos Hormos (modern el Quseir) with great difficulty and landed at Leukè-Komè. Recent explorations of the northwestern Hijaz tend to prove that this important emporium lies in the 'Ainuna archaeological complex (FIG. 1) and not at el Wajh². As the Roman expedition was a complete failure, Syllaeus was accused of treachery and condemned later to death in Rome. In fact, when Strabo's account is considered, the Nabataean Minister is believed to have led the expedition through the normal way of southern Arabia since the army traversed Negrani (Negrân), Asca (Neshaq), Athrula (Yathil) and reached Marsiaba, identified as Marib Saba³. This city was an important terminal for the spices of India, and the frankincense and myrrh of Hadramaut. Nabataean sherds were identified at Ma'rib.⁴ The incense road proceeded from Ma'rib to Negrân, Mekka, Yathrib and Hegra to the north or to Central Arabia, passing by the recently excavated trade centre of Qaryat al

Fau where evidence of Nabataean presence was recognised⁵. It then reached Gherra in the Arabian–Persian Gulf and Charax in Mesopotamia. Running along the Euphrates, the track connects Hit, Doura Europos and the large caravan centre of Palmyra.

To control the spice trade, Augustus inaugurated a direct sea route between Egypt and India⁶ and diverted the incense road through the Red Sea to Myos Hormos, Coptos on the Nile and the port of Alexandria. Strabo, however, mentions a land track between Egypt and Arabia: 'Yet camel-traders travel back and forth from Petra to this place (Leukè-Komè) in safety and ease, and in such numbers of men and camels that they differ in no respect from an army' (*Geog.* xvi, 4, 23). This track of southern Sinai, the easiest of the desert routes⁷, actually called *darb el-Shi'wi* (درب الشعوي) (FIG. 2, No. 7), passes north of the Isle of Graye, by Wadi Tweibeh and Taba. Nabataean, Roman and Byzantine graffiti are engraved in Wadi Umm Sidreh and Wadi Taba. It crosses Bir eth-Themed, Qal'at el Jindi and arrives at Suez (Cleopatra). The Peutinger Table records this road, which was followed in 1184 by Saladin according to *Kitab al-Rawdatain* (*The Two Gardens*) of Abu Shama⁸ when he was on his way to besiege Renald de Châtillon at Karak.

The '*darb el hajj*'⁹ (درب الحج FIG. 2, No. 6) is a parallel route which started from Suez, followed Wadi Sadr Hiţân and reached the citadel of Nikhl where the Mamluks had established large water reservoirs. It continued by Bir eth-Themed

⁵ A. R. Al-Ansari, *Qaryat el-Fau, A portrait of pre-Islamic civilisation*, University of Riyadh, 1957–82, p. 22 and 63, 2–5. The sherds published by Dr Ansari fall into two groups: Early Nabataean (1st century BC–AD 63, 4–5, and Late Nabataean (2nd to 4th century AD): 63, 2–3.

⁶ J. I. Miller, *The Spice Trade of the Roman Empire*, Oxford, 1969, p. 14.

⁷ Na'um Shoucair, *The History of Sinai and Arabs*, Cairo, 1916 (in arabic) p. 265; T. W. Kowalski, 'Les chemins du désert sinaitique' in *Le Monde de la Bible*, 10 (1979) p. 7.

⁸ Ch. Clermont-Ganneau, *RAO*, vii (1906) p. 285–294. The author adds p. 294: 'Il serait intéressant, à certains égards, de comparer cet itinéraire de Saladin à celui du Sultan Baibars qui, environ quatre vingts ans plus tard, se transporta du Caire à Pétra et semble avoir suivi un autre chemin. Mais la place et le temps me manquent pour faire aujourd'hui cette comparaison. J'espère pouvoir y revenir à une autre occasion.' I did not find in the bulk of articles published by Clermont-Ganneau the announced study.

⁹ For a recent study, see Sh. Tamari, 'Darb al-Hajj in Sinai', *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Memorie*, S.viii. Vol. xxv, 4, Roma, 1982.

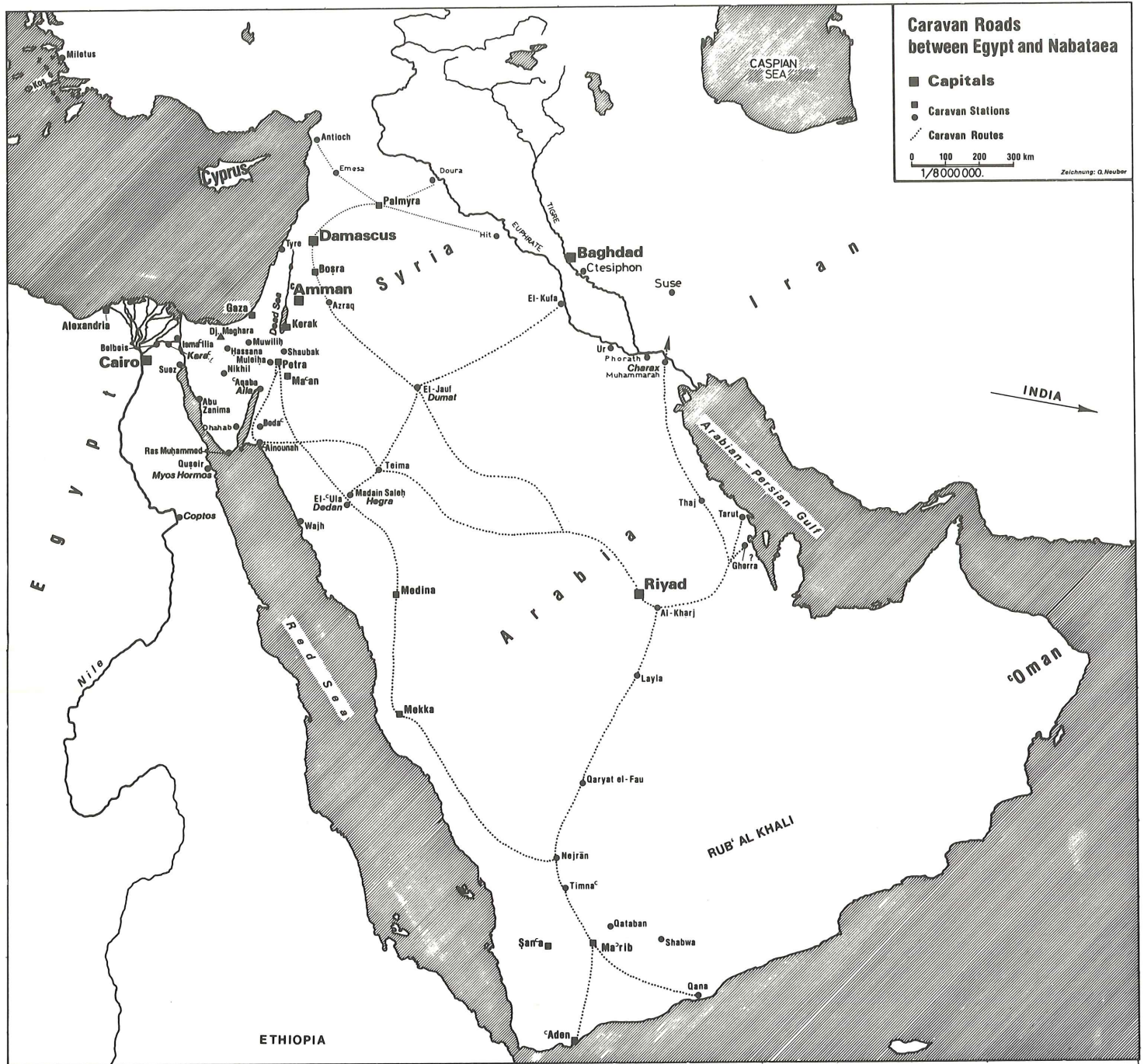
¹ Strabo, *Geog.*, xvi, 4, 22–24, Ed. Loeb Classical Library, 1966.

² M. L. Ingraham *et alii*, *Atlat*, 5 (1981) p. 77–78.

³ For a good critical analysis of this campaign with bibliography, see Jacqueline Pirenne, *Le Royaume Sub-Arabe de Qatabân et sa datation*, Louvain, 1961, p. 122 ff.

⁴ Rolf Stucky, *Antike Welt*, 14 (1983) p. 12 and Figs. 10–11.

1. Trade Routes of the Middle-East.

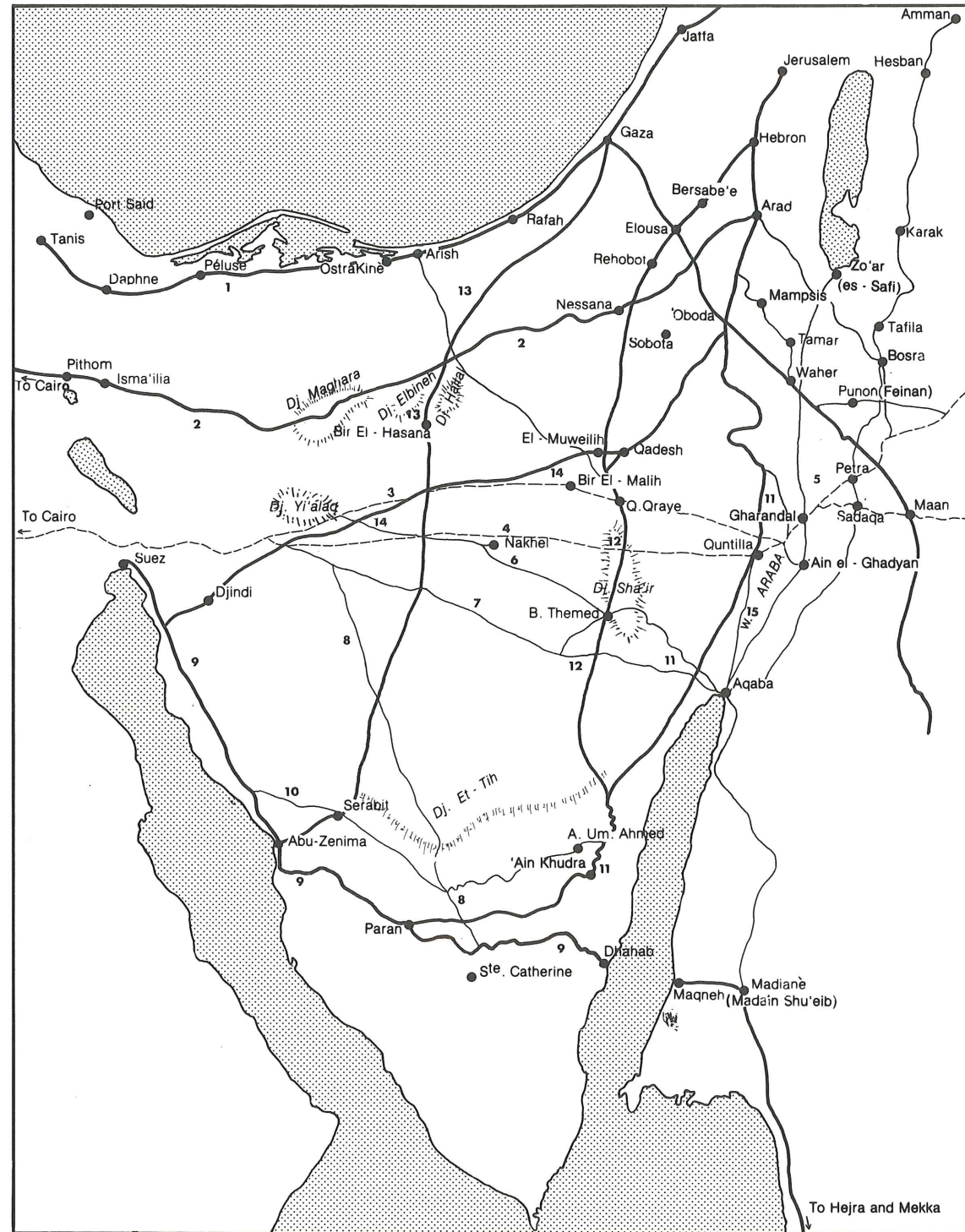


and descended to Aila-Aqaba by the tortuous defile of Naqb el-^cAqaba which was improved in the Mamluk period by al-Malik el-Naser Muhammad, son of Qalawun (1319) and by Qansuh el-Ghawri in 1508. Excellent engineering work was carried out in the sixteenth century by the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman, before it was opened to motor traffic in the 1930s¹⁰. This route became the main access to the Holy Cities

of Mekka and Medina after the recovery of Aila by Baibars in 1276. But originally, the pilgrims followed the eastern coast of the Red Sea, crossing Wadi Sidri and Wadi Mukattab (Valley of the Inscriptions) before reaching the oasis of Feirân (ancient Paran), mentioned by Diodorus Siculus and Strabo as the Phoinikôn (FIG. 2, No. 9). According to Diodorus, an altar of stone was built in this oasis, served by a priest and a priestess. The Arabs of the area used to organise festivals and sacrifice to their gods. Al-'Uzza, the main goddess of Petra,

¹⁰ Major C. S. Jarvis, *Yesterday and Today in Sinai*, London, 1938, p. 270-273.

2. Caravan routes of the Sinai, after T. W. Kowalski, *Le Monde de la Bible*, 10 (1979) p. 21.



was certainly venerated at this place¹¹. From Feirân, the pilgrims could ascend Jebal el Munâjah (the mountain of the Conference) where a Nabataean sanctuary was recently

discovered¹². From there, they could reach the port of Dhahab (‘Aidhâb of the Medieval period) and cross the Red Sea to Meqneh. The incense road (درب البخور) leads them to Mekka.

¹¹ Many inscriptions of the Sinai commemorate al-‘Uzza. See J. Starcky, *Dic. de la Bib. Sup.* vii, Col. 1003.

¹² A. Negev, *IEJ*, 27 (1977) p. 219–231.

Rhinocolura (Al-^cArish, FIG. 2, No. 15). This is the modern darb el-Ghazzeḥ (درب الغزّة) which was the direct way of the Nabataeans to the port of Rhinocolura to export to the West the Arabian and Indian spices, passing by Kantilla and Bir el Mayîn. This route connected also Rafah and Gaza.

Two tracks in northern Sinai linked up Egypt with Palestine and Syria. The shortest way along the Mediterranean coast is the 'via maris' from Pelusium to Gaza, which was the Pharaonic invasion road (FIG. 2, No. 1, 'tarîq el Forma' in Arabic).

Parallel to it runs, about 35 km. to the South, the important road from Isma'ilia to Palestine and Syria (FIG. 2, No. 2). Na'um Shoucair states that 'this was the main trade route between Syria and Egypt before the opening of the Suez Canal and was called el-Darb el-Misri (الدرب المصري)¹³. Starting from Cairo, it descended Wadi Ṭumeilât and proceeded East traversing the mountainous area of northern Sinai. The segment between Isma'ilia and Jabal Maghara is an arid area (*ard el-tîb*) without wells, and difficult to cross because of moving sand dunes¹⁴. This road was partly followed by Sultan Baibars in 1276 (674 H.) from Cairo to Karak, passing by Petra. The account of this journey was quoted by the chronicler Nuwairi (1279–1332)¹⁵ after Muḥyi el-Dîn Ibn'Abd el-Zâher (1223–92), who was an annalist of Baibars and composed a biography of the Sultan¹⁶. Nuwairi recognises that his account is but a summary of Ibn'Abd el-Zâher's detailed report. His manuscript, which is in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, No. 1578, in Dar el Kutub of Cairo (No. 551) and in Leiden, was first brought to the attention of scholars in 1835 by the French Orientalist M. Quatremère, who translated the passage concerning the visit to Petra¹⁷. Fortunately, I was able to consult all three of the manuscripts which show irrelevant variants. Because the text is unique for Arabic historiography, it is interesting with respect to the caravan roads to follow the journey day by day and station by station according to the map (FIG. 1) which I was able to establish with the generous help of the Tübingen Atlas for the Near East (TAVO)¹⁸.

The reason for Baibars' journey was a plot which was hatched against him at Karak and intended to overthrow his governors in that city and set on the throne an Ayyubid prince, the brother of Sultan al-Mu'azzam. The English translation tries to follow literally the Arabic manuscript¹⁹:

'The Sultan departed from his Citadel (Qal'at el Jabal) on Thursday, 12th Dhul-Hujja [674 H.] and halted at

Belbeis where he rested until the mid-afternoon. He remounted and encamped at Râs el Mâ', in Wadi es-Sadîr from which he removed on Saturday, in the middle of the night and reached Karâ'; he reposed until the setting of the sun.'

These first three stations are easy to identify: Belbeis, a well known city, lies 35 km. north of Cairo. Wadi es-Sadîr is mentioned in Mu'jam el Buldân of Yaqut, and is called today Wadi Ṭumeilât²⁰, after a modern Arab tribe. A well, Bîr Râs el Mâ', is located on an old map of Egypt, established by Muhammed Bey, by order of HRH Isma'îl Pacha, Khedive of Egypt, in the eastern Wadi Ṭumeilat, on the Isma'ilia road. It could be identified with Râs el Mâ' of Nuweiri, but no mention of this spring occurs in the Egyptian geographical index. Karâ', mentioned in some Arabic chronicles of the Mamluk period²¹, is a village near 'Abbâseh, in the eastern province of Abu Hammâd. It has disappeared and is to be looked for at the site of 'Isbet es-Salamôni²². Nuwairi continues:

'He carried water for two days' provision and set out on the Badriyyah route, continuing his way at a forced march to the dawn of Monday, neither resting nor allowing his companions any repose except that which sufficed to water the horses and take their ration of fodder. He then encamped at the foot of Jabal Badr.'

As noted above, Baibars followed the Isma'ilia–Palestine road (el-darb el-Misri). Since it is devoid in its first section of water sources, the Sultan was obliged to carry water for two days. Jabal Badr is not easy to identify in the northern Sinai mountains because it is not recorded by the Arab geographers I was able to examine, but it lies, according to the annalist, at two days' march from Karâ'. M. Quatremère, followed by some modern scholars²³, claimed that Badriyyah and Badr are corruptions of Petra, a hypothesis which has no linguistic or geographical proof, for this mountain is three stations away from Petra, as could be deduced from the text of Nuwairi:

'He remounted at the first light, so arduous was the track, and reached Badr. He halted at the spring. [Ibn 'Abd ez-Zâher] reported it is a green mountain, devoid of any plant. The spring gushed from the West, under a huge mountain, from a rock-cut cave. One can enter into it about ten paces and find a fountain on his left hand. Before his arrival, the Sultan had sent a group

¹³ Na'um Shoucair, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

¹⁴ T. W. Kowalski, *Le Monde de la Bible*, 10 (1979) p. 20; C. S. Jarvis, *op. cit.* p. 264.

¹⁵ *Nihayat el-'arab fi 'ilm el adab*, manuscript.

¹⁶ *ar-rawd el-zaher fi sirat el malik el-zaher*, edited by A. Khuweiter, Riyad, 1976. Unfortunately the passage on the journey of Baibars is missing in this published manuscript.

¹⁷ *Memoire sur les Nabateens*, 1835, p. 27f.

¹⁸ I am grateful to Dr W. Röllig, S. Mittmann, W. Zwicker and the excellent draughtsman G. Neuber who kindly helped me execute this map.

¹⁹ I am grateful to Mr 'Ali Jabri who helped in the translation.

²⁰ See the excellent geographical index of M. Ramzi: *el qamus el jughrâfi lilbilad el misriyyah*, 1, Cairo, 1954–55, p. 474.

²¹ Al-Dawadâri, *Kanz el-durar wa jâmi' el gharur*, VIII, Cairo, 1971, edited by U. Haarmann, p. 17; Maqrizi, *Histoire des Sultans Mamloukes de l'Egypte*, translated by M. Quatremère, Paris, 1837, p. 19.

²² See M. Ramzi, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

²³ *Mémoire sur Pétra et les Nabatéens*, Paris, 1835, p. 26: 'Ces noms, comme il est facile de le voir, nous rappellent les noms antiques de Pétra et de l'Arabie Pétrée.' Such a conclusion has no philological ground. A. Kammerer, *Pétra et la Nabatène*, Paris, 1929, p. 366 and J. Starcky, *Dic. Bib. Sup.* VII, col. 993 accepted this identification.

of Bedouins²⁴ and ordered them to collect from the cave whatever water was available to drink. They prepared around the spring basins dug in the earth, like little pools enclosed by stones and filled them with water. The sultan and his companions drew water and took provision. Without this arrangement, they could have perished from the rush to water. The Sultan entered the cave and sat at the mouth of the spring; he himself filled for his companions their water skins and handed them to each one of them, until they filled all they had.'

Jabal Badr is the mountain massif east of Isma'ilia, for the Badriyyah route (طريق البدرية) is mentioned in 1250 (648 H.) by al-Dawadâri (ca. 1285–1336)²⁵, another Mamluk chronicler, and by Maqrizi²⁶ (1364–1442) as the site of the battle between el Malik el-Naser of Damascus and el-Mo'ezz Aybak, the Turcoman of Egypt. There is no doubt in this case that Badr is in the Sinai, at two days' march from Karâ'. Two mountains could be candidates for the site: Jebel Yalleg and Jabal Maghara, the latter being more likely. It rises to 735 m. (Shushet el-Maghara) and exposes formations of Esna shale from the Upper Cretaceous age of green colour²⁷. Thick layers of the same formation exist in Jebel Yalleg. A valley, Wadi Maghara, runs at the foot of the former mountain, so called, explains Na'um Shoucair²⁸, because of 'a cave at its head, similar to the cave of Mayîn. Near it is an old grotto, excavated in the rock, actually covered with sand. The ruins of an old citadel of the Roman [sic] period lie on the hill which overlooks the grotto'.

This situation fits the description of Nuwairi: 'The spring gushed from the West, under a huge mountain, from a rock-cut cave'. It is surprising that Shoucair is the only author to describe this site, although I consulted many volumes on the Sinai. The citadel described as 'Roman' is evidence of an old route in this area. A careful survey would certainly reveal a Mamluk occupation as is the case in the Citadel of Nikhl²⁹. At any rate, Jabal Badr is at three stations if not more from Petra in the Sinai, according to Nuwairi:

'He rode on from Badr and halted at Ḥassana, an isolated well which he left until he reached a spring called Mulaiḥa where he drew water. He continued his way and pitched his tents at the foot of the mountain known as Naqb el-Rubâ'i.'

Ḥassana is a remote station on the road from Suez to Palestine. From there, the track proceeds east and can reach Wadi 'Araba by Wadi el-Jarafa or Wadi el-Jîb. The 'Mulaiḥa

route' is said to be 'the invasion way of the Sinai from the East'³⁰, running from 'Aqaba to Petra. In fact, there is more than 100 km. in a direct line from Ḥassana to Mulaiḥa, a fact which suggests that Nuwairi missed some station in between or Baibars endured another forced march. A caravan of the Ecole Biblique of Jerusalem³¹, travelling from Nikhl, reached Petra from this route in 1906. They avoided 'Ain el Muleiḥa (today called Menouha on the Sinai maps) and ascended the Naqb el-Rubâ'i, the mountain at the shoulder of Jabal Harûn by Jibâl Sumr el-Tiyyibeh.

Looking for the exact route of Baibars into Petra, I was able to walk or trace, with the help of the bedouins, six access roads from Wadi 'Araba. To the South, the route Suez—Ma'ân ascends by Wadi Gharandal (*Aridella*) to Sadaqa (*Sadagatta*) (FIG. 2, No. 3). It was possible to travel by Landrover from the village of Garandal through Wadi es-Sîq, a narrow colourful gorge, strewn with large boulders, and reach Delagha in two hours (30 km.). At el-Râjef, the explorer can enjoy a most fascinating panorama of the sandstone mountain range of Petra. At 3 kilometres from Delagha, a road bifurcates to Sadaqa or descends through Ṭayyibeh to Wadi Musa. Parallel to the Suez—Ma'ân route, runs the Suez—Petra track (FIG. 2, No. 4), which can reach the Nabataean capital from Wadi 'Araba by Wadi Şabra, Wadi Abu Khusheibeh or Naqb el-Rubâ'i, the latter being the easiest for camels (Major C. S. Jarvis had problems with his loaded camels in the ascent of Abu Khusheibeh. See below). This caravan road was probably described by Strabo³² as the track from Babylon to Egypt by Petra.

A fifth outlet to Wadi 'Araba runs through Wadi Musa. A large terraced area, called *Roman Gardens* by the bedouins, extends at its mouth, west of Qasr Umm Rattam (FIG. 3). This caravan station, situated on a small island between two branches of Wadi Musa, is a square tower (13 m.) A water reservoir at the northern side of the tower is fed by a long channel which drains the wadi's water. From there, a steep and narrow track climbs up to Petra by Wadi el-Siyyagh or to Beida by Sleisel. Finally, an easier outlet to the North, can cross to the Negev through Beida, Sîq Umm el 'Alda, Namala and Bîr Madhkûr.

Baibars, who was eager to reach Karak in a short time, had travelled by the shortest way (five days from Cairo to Petra). The last segment of his track had certainly impressed the chronicler:

'And thus, at the break of dawn, he ascended the mountain, and wondrous high it was, cut with tortuous ravines and these of crumbling stones, resemblant unto hardened sand, changing in their hues from red to azure and white; thither also were defiles in the mountains admitting the horseman riding through, in which are places as though rising steps hewn in the rock. On this

²⁴ In the manuscript: 'Arabs'.

²⁵ *Kanz el-durar*, op. cit. p. 17; *Histoire des Sultans Mamloukes*, op. cit. p. 19.

²⁶ *Histoire des Sultans Mamloukes*, op. cit. p. 19f.

²⁷ Rushdi Said, *The Geology of Egypt*, Amsterdam—New York, 1962, p. 230ff. and especially p. 238; see also Ibrahim G. Mahmoud, *Etudes paléontologiques sur la faune crétacique du massif du Moghara (Sinai—Egypte)*, Alexandrie, 1956; M. Har-El, *The Sinai Journeys*, p. 19, describes the Jebel Maghara Massif as a 'crater'.

²⁸ *The History of Sinai and Arabs*, p. 76.

²⁹ Sh. Tamari, *Darb el Hajj in Sinai*, op. cit. p. 468.

³⁰ Na'um Shoucair, op. cit., p. 203.

³¹ *RB*, XIII (1906) p. 443ff.

³² T. W. Kowalski, *Le Monde de la Bible*, 10 (1979) p. 20.

3. Qasr Umm Rattam; water reservoir in the foreground.
(Looking S–E).



mountain is the tomb of Aaron, Prophet of God, the brother of Moses, son of 'Umrân, peace upon them, on the left of the traveller whose face is unto Damascus.'

The description of the itinerary by Nuwairi is accurate. Actually, the road which traverses Naqb el-Rubâ'i by Jibâl Sumr el-Tiyyibeh, ascends Wadi Jarret Salmân or Jurf Himâr and leaving Jebel Harûn to the left, drops down to Petra. In 1940, Major C. S. Jarvis³³, travelling from the Sinai, organised a caravan expedition by camels and horses from Wadi Abu Khusheibeh into Petra (FIG. 4). He identified 'the old made track' which leads to the shoulder of Jebel Harûn. I followed the same caravan route with a team from Paris, starting from Qasr el Bint, and reached the bed of Wadi Abu Khusheibeh, where extensive ruins are extant, in four hours. Little Nabataean pottery was collected at the ruins called Sayâlet Abu Khushiebeh, compared to the Late Roman and Byzantine pottery. There is a large water reservoir at the foot of Jebel Harûn (FIG. 5), known today as Bîr Huweimel (FIG. 6). At the bottom of Jebel el Farasheh, the slopes are terraced, and barrages built with large boulders extend in Wadi 'Iyâl 'Id. No doubt such an agricultural technique was initiated by the Nabataeans. Another rock-cut cistern provided with a drain is at the mouth of the valley. The route passes by Jibâl el Barrâh (FIG. 7), near the snake monument where the passage is carved in the sandstone and at the foot of Umm el Biyarah

³³ *Antiquity*, xiv (1940) p. 138–147.

where Arabic graffiti dated 723 H. = 1323 were recently noticed³⁴. Crossing Wadi Farasa the path leads to the Pillar of Pharaoh and Qasr el Bint.

After Jebel Harûn, Baibars arrived at a citadel:

'And hence up a fortress known as al-Aşwît, climbed the Sultan and looked upon it and held it the most awesome of strongholds and among the most puissant'.

Where is al-Aşwît (الاصويت) to be located? Four strongholds exist within the Petra National Park. The most famous and best preserved is al-Wu'eirah³⁵ at the northeastern approach to the site, between Beiða and Wadi Musa village. A second one, which has been surveyed by Dalman,³⁶ is situated on the crest of Jebel el Madhbaḥ, known as Zibb 'Attuf. Another outpost dominates the entrance into Sîq el Bâred at Beiða³⁷. The fourth citadel, el-Ḥabis³⁸, commands the southern approach of the city and overlooks the road to the Sinai and Egypt. Dalman, followed by Horsfield, identified el-Ḥabis with el-Sela³⁹, described by Yaḳût in *Mu'jam el-Buldân* (1225) as

³⁴ They were brought to my attention by Mr Suleimân el Farajât, Inspector of Petra.

³⁵ R. Savignac, *RB*, x (1903), p. 114–120.

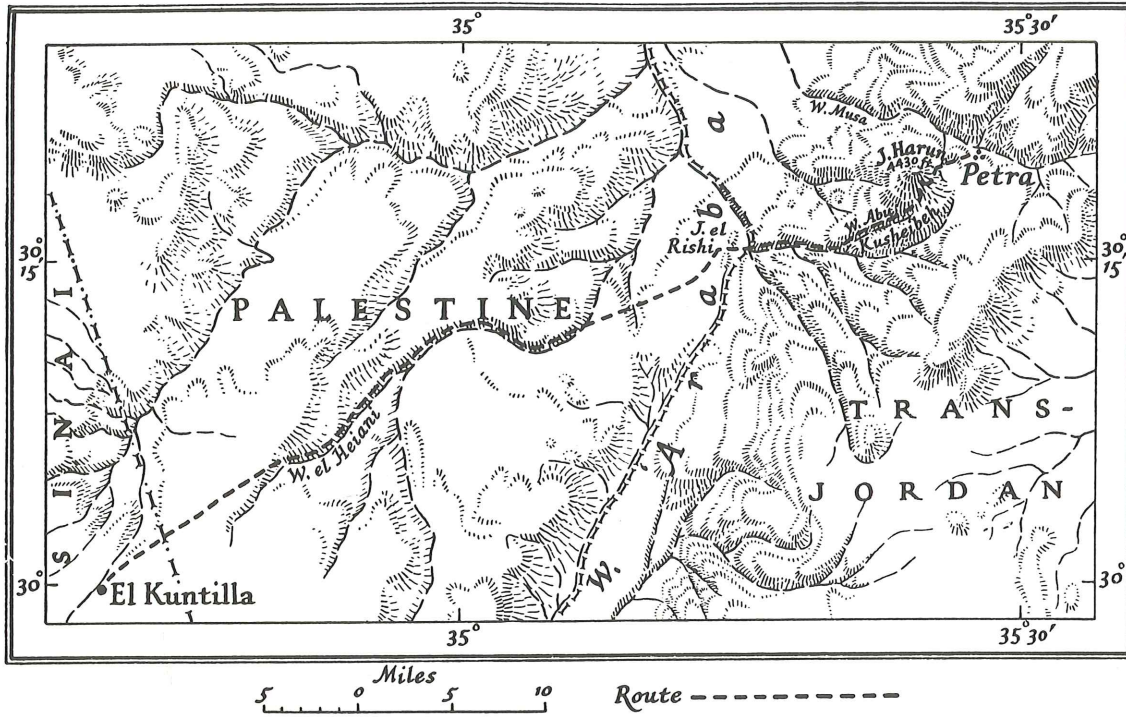
³⁶ *Neue-Petra Forschungen*, Leipzig, 1912, p. 12ff and Figs 3–4.

³⁷ Discovered by A. Musil and identified by him with Hurmuz, see Dalman, *Neue-Petra*, *op. cit.* p. 14.

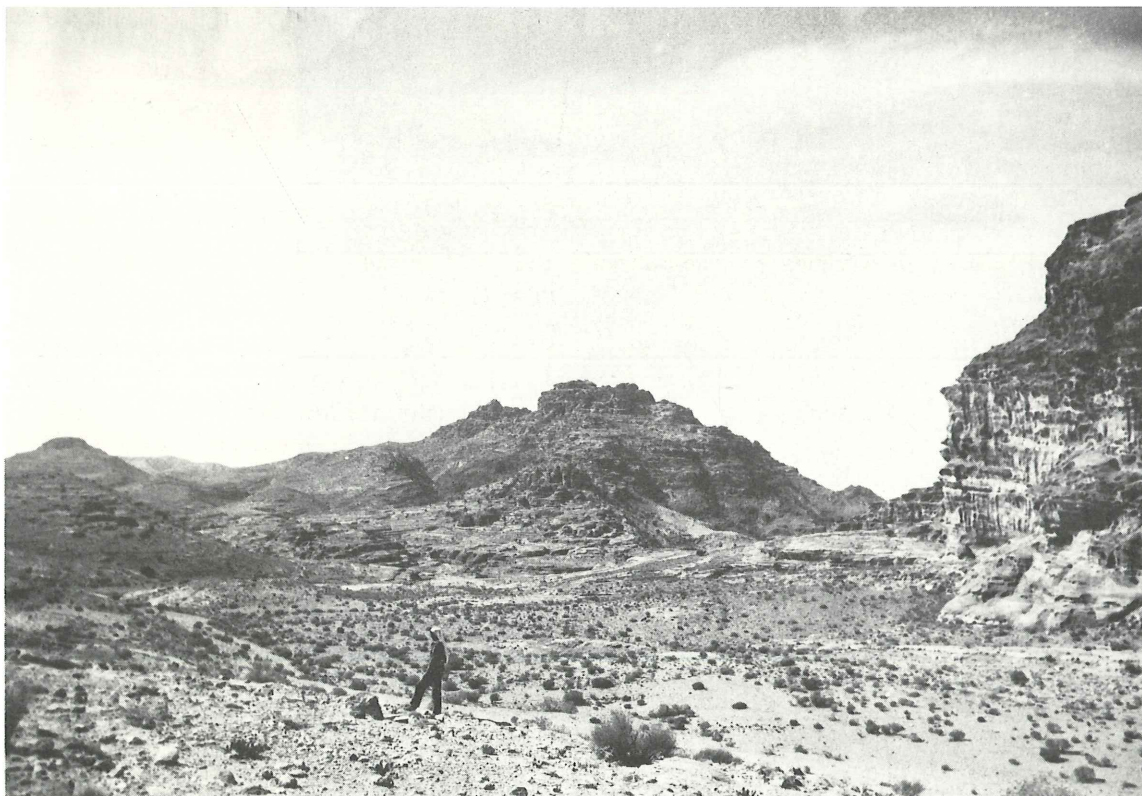
³⁸ Ph. Hammond, *The Crusader Fort on El-Habis at Petra*, Utah, 1970.

³⁹ *QDAP*, vii (1938) p. 5.

4. The itinerary of C. S. Jarvis from the Sinai to Petra by Wadi Abu-Khusheibeh and Jebel Harûn, *Antiquity*, xiv (1940) p. 139.



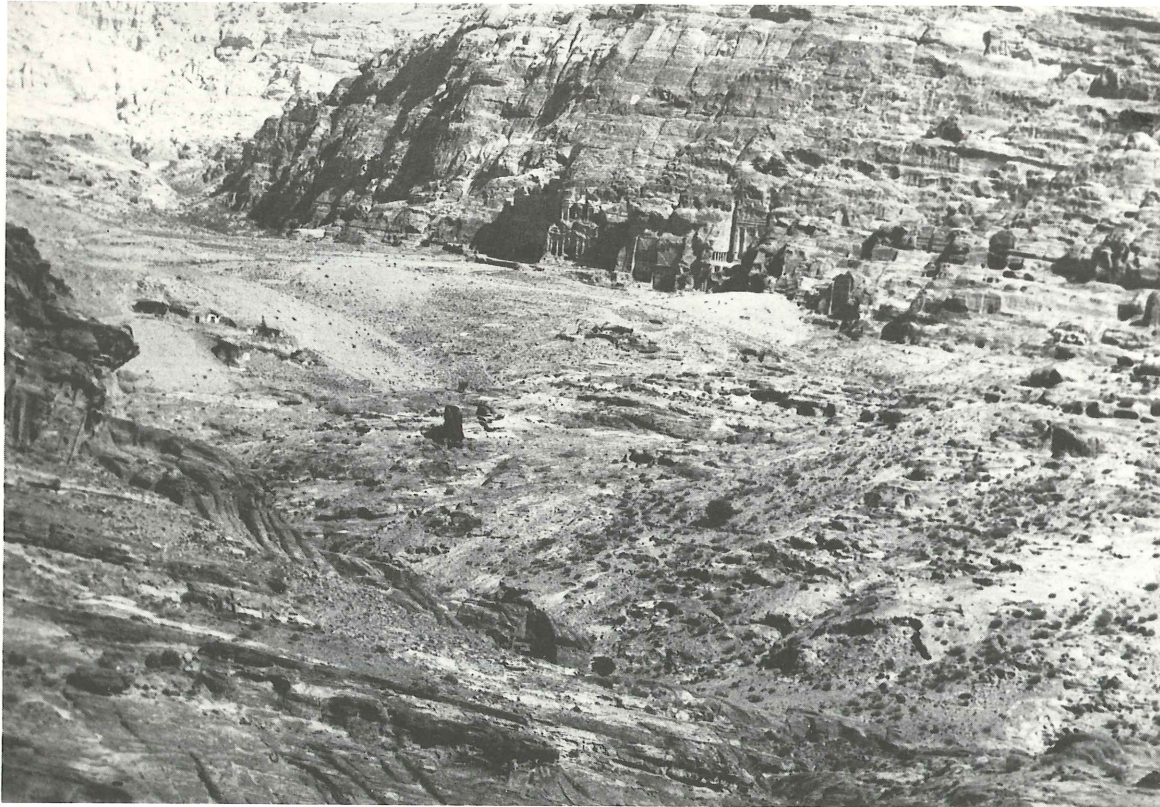
5. Jebel Harûn. (Looking West).



6. Bîr Huweimel water reservoir (left) at the junction of Naqb Abu-Khusheibeh (right) and Naqb el-Rubâ'i routes. (Looking East).



7. The descent to Petra by Jibâl el-Barrah and Umm el-Biyarah; in the background the large tombs of Khubtha. (Looking N-E).



'citadel in Wadi Musa, peace upon him, near Jerusalem'⁴⁰. As a matter of fact, Yaqût does not refer to the exact situation of the citadel but rather to the area, for under the name Wu'eirah he notes: 'A citadel in the Shara mountain, near Wadi Musa'⁴¹. Modern scholars such as G. Horsfield identified Biblical Sela' (from which king Amasia of Juda (796–781) hurled down 10,000 Edomite captives (II Kings, XIV: 7) with Umm el-Biyarah⁴². But Mrs C. M. Bennett, who uncovered an extensive Edomite settlement on top of this rock, found no evidence of occupation from the time of Amasia⁴³. On the other hand, J. Starcky, who carefully analysed the Biblical texts, concluded that 'three of the seven passages examined are in favour of a northern location of Sela', while four, especially the passage of II Kings, are not decisive'⁴⁴. In 1907, A. Musil⁴⁵ drew the attention of scholars to the site of Sela', north of Buṣeirah, on the road to Ṭafleḥ. This isolated rock is a natural fortress, accessible by a narrow stairway, hewn in the solid rock and provided on its flat top with large cisterns (FIG. 9). Many structures are also visible. When I visited the site with Dr M. Lindner, president of the Naturhistorisches Gesellschaft in Nürnberg, I collected sherds from the Early Bronze Age up to the Mamluk period. It is remarkable that the sherds of the Medieval period are the most abundant⁴⁶. Taking into consideration the conclusions of Mrs Bennett, of Father Starcky, and the indications of the Arab chroniclers, it seems likely that at least the Medieval Sela' is to be equated with the natural fortified shelter north of Buseirah⁴⁷. Besides, two Arab chroniclers, Abu Shâma in the *'Two Gardens'* and Ibn el-Athîr in *'El-kamel fi al-tawârikh'* record that el-Sela' and el-Wu'eirah were taken in 1188 by Saladin's forces and Dr Hammond correctly notes 'Hence, the two obviously are not identical'⁴⁸. But this author, who published an excellent survey of el-Ḥabîs, identified el-Wu'eirah with el-Aṣwît. His arguments, however, are untenable: he supposes that 'Baibars entered Petra from the east, visited Jebel Harûn, and moved northwards past the Qasr'⁴⁹. This hypothesis is contradicted by the text of Nuwairi, which does not look at all 'garbled' as was believed by Hammond: 'On this mountain is the tomb of

Aaron . . . on the left of the traveller whose face is unto Damascus'. The whole itinerary shows Baibars moving from south-southwest to north-northeast, ending at Moses's spring. Furthermore, Hammond himself admits that: 'The use of the name al-Aṣwît instead of al-Wu'eirah is inexplicable, and does not occur elsewhere in the literature, or in any of the present place names around Wadi Musa', and that al-Wu'eirah is 'still known by that name'⁵⁰. In this case, the only reasonable solution is to identify al-Aṣwît with el-Ḥabîs or with the outpost of Zibb 'Attuf, which is but an insignificant fortress. But Dr Hammond rejects the equation with el-Ḥabîs because of Nuwairi's description ' . . . and held it the most awesome of strongholds and among the most puissant'. He thinks that these qualifications fit al-Wu'eirah; in fact, Nuwairi probably exaggerated the account of his source. It is true that el-Ḥabîs, in its present state, is rather a poor citadel. But when the two published plans are compared (FIGS 8 and 10), el-Ḥabîs, measuring 156.5 m. by 74 m. is more extensive than el-Wu'eirah (98 m. by 55 m., or 124 m. by 55 m. with the front wall). It is at any rate more skilfully adapted to the jagged sandstone crests; it also lies in a better strategic position on the trade route from Egypt than does al-Wu'eirah (FIG. 11). This position could have excited the admiration of the medieval chronicler.

Nuwairi gives hereafter a vivid and picturesque image of the Nabataean capital:

'And he descended through the gorge of Rubâ'î which windeth through the mountains to the cities of the Children of Israël, amidst most marvelous caves. Those are houses adorned with columns and gates; the façades are sculpted into the very rock face by carving of chisels, all fretted and friezed into decorative living forms as though they were dwellings for people today'.

The chronicler mentions Naqb el-Rubâ'î, once again, insisting on the direction followed by the Sultan as discussed above. The definition of the monuments as 'houses' follows the Islamic tradition attached to the Nabataean tombs of Medain-Saleh (Ḥegra) described by the Koran as the dwellings of Thamud⁵¹. By 'façades' adorned with columns and carvings, he certainly refers to the large rockcut mausolea and more precisely to the Khazneh, for immediately after comes what is evidently the description of the narrow gorge, the famous Siq of Petra:

'And he saith that God almighty created there two parallel mountains cleft in twain by a conduct route hemmed in on either side as by sheer precipitous walls, to the right and left of which rear up the abodes'.

These exact and at the same time poetic images of the Siq are no doubt truer to fact than the romantic and florid fantasies

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 32.

⁵¹ Surat xv, Al-Hijr, 82: 'They hewed their dwellings into the mountain and lived in safety'.

⁴⁰ Ed. Dâr Sader, Beirut, 1957, vol. III, p. 236.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 380.

⁴² 'Sela-Petra, The Rock of Edom and Nabatene', *QDAP*, VII (1938) p. 1ff.

⁴³ *RB*, LXXIII (1966) p. 372–402. The author concludes p. 402: 'Nous n'avons trouvé aucun indice d'une occupation sédentaire à Umm el-Biyara au temps d'Amasia de Juda'. N. Glueck who had identified Umm el Biyarah with Biblical Sela' retracted after the excavations of Mrs Bennett (*The Other Side of the Jordan*, Cambridge, Mass., 1970, p. 29).

⁴⁴ *Dic. Bib. Sup.* VII, col. 895.

⁴⁵ *Arabia Petraea*, II, 1, Vienna, 1908, p. 318. See also N. Glueck, *op. cit.*, p. 197–204 with good illustrations.

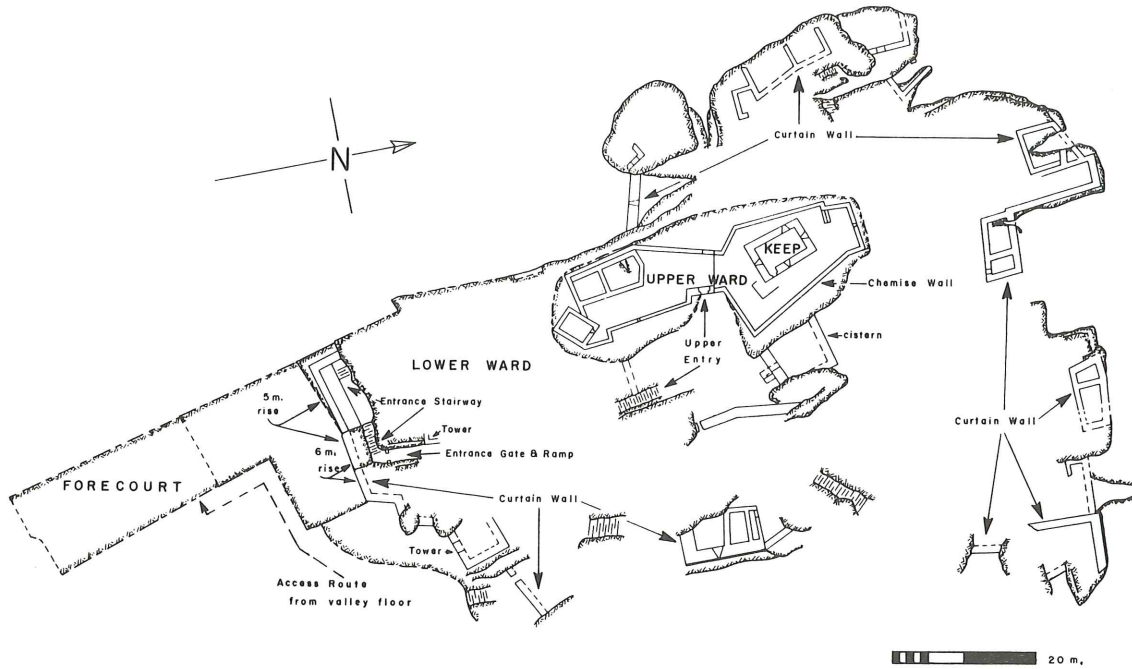
⁴⁶ M. Lindner ed., *Petra und das Königreich der Nabatäer*, Munich, 1983, p. 269 and Fig. 17.

⁴⁷ N. Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan*, *op. cit.*, p. 199, rejects the identification of Biblical Sela' with this rock because 'There is not . . . enough evidence of occupation early enough in the Iron Age' . . . Unfortunately, there have been no excavations on the site to confirm or invalidate this statement.

⁴⁸ *The Crusader Fort*, *op. cit.* p. 32.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 33.

8. General Plan of el-Habîs, after Ph. Hammond, *The Crusader Fort*, pl. III.



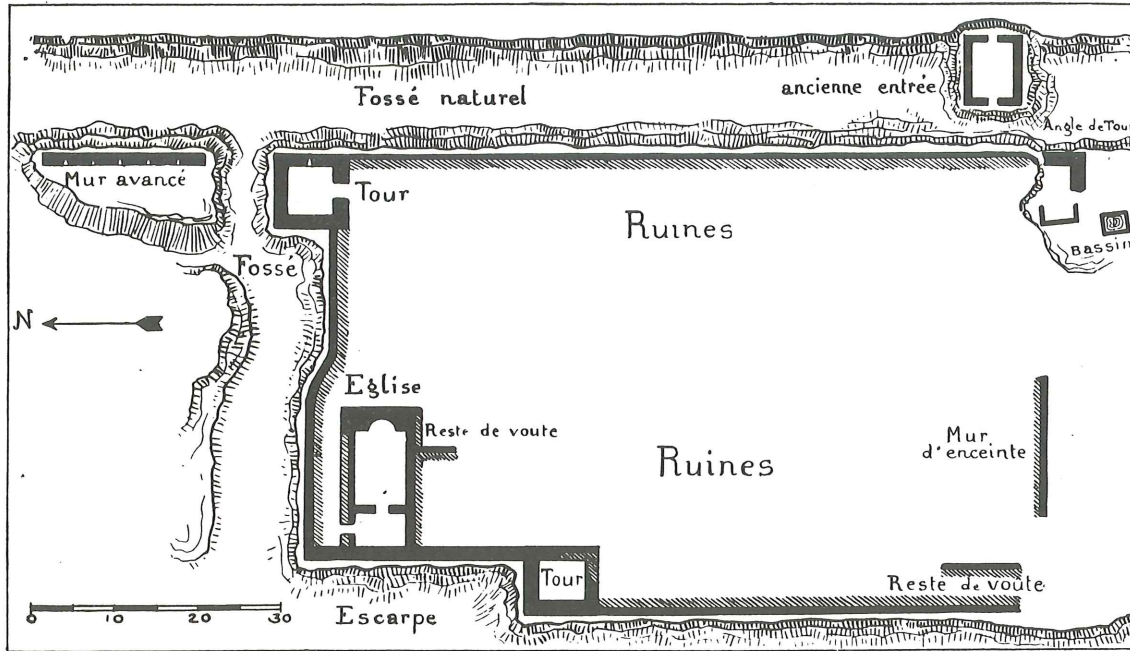
9. El-Sela' Rock near Buṣeirah. (Looking West).



of the 19th century explorers. The houses which are said to line the gorge refer probably to the tombs in the outer Siq or at the entrance of the site, in the Bab el-Siq area. The Sultan continued his way to the village today called Wadi Musa or el-Jî:

'Then came the Sultan from those places to Wadi el-Madarah and to the village called el-'Odma, known as such for within it lies the spring which Moses, son of 'Umrân, peace upon him, struck with his rod and that which once flowed with blood. He called on it to change

10. General Plan of el-Wu'eirah, after R. Savignac, *RB*, x (1903) p. 116.



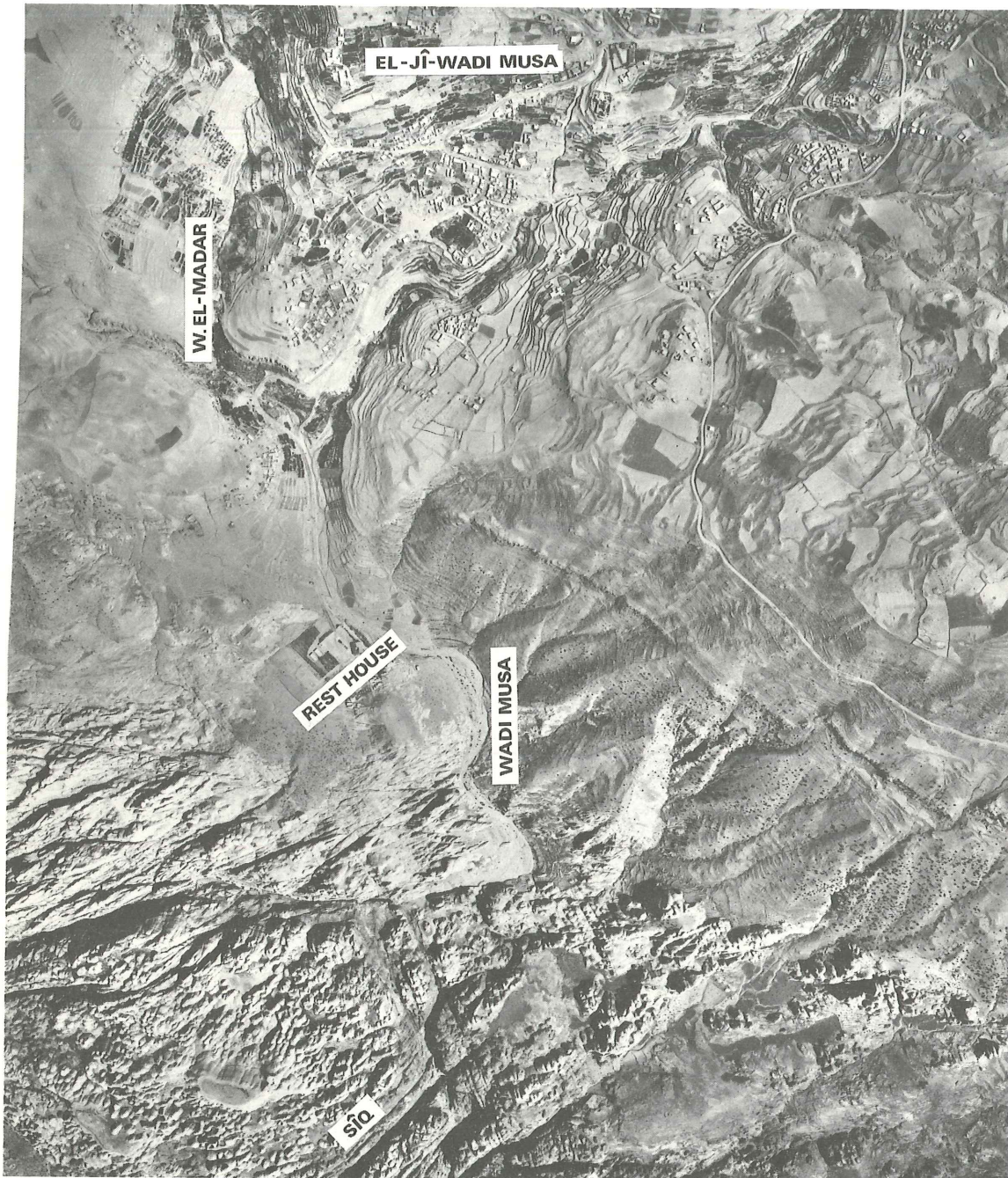
11. El-Habis Fort from Umm el-Biyarah with the columned Street. (Looking N-E).



by command of God unto fresh water and lo! it changed unto crystal-clear water, sweet and cool. The Sultan rested there'.

According to Nuwairi, the miracle performed by Moses is the changing of blood into water, and this marvel explains for him the name of the village: (عدما) 'return to water'. But I see

12. Aerial view of Wadi Musa village (el-Jî); to the left Wadi el-Madar. (Photo IGN, Paris).



in it a corruption of the name Edom, since the changing of *alef* into *ain* is common in Arabic: *ʿAsqalân* for Ascalon. In the colloquial Arabic of the bedouins of Petra, the same phenomenon can be noticed: *ʿoummi* for *ʿummi*: my mother.

Wadi el Madarah is a tributary of Wadi Musa torrent, known today as Wadi el-Madar, which was the ancient route leading from Petra to Tawilân, ascending from the modern hamlet of Zurrabeh (FIG. 12) to the north-northeast. At its mouth gushes the spring called el-ʿOdmal by the old villagers.

It is today less important than the spring at the entrance of Wadi Musa. The former was probably the one known in the medieval period as the miraculous spring of Moses, and not the fountain recognised today.

‘[Baibars] retired from thence on the night of Saturday the twenty-first (6th June, 1276) reaching the castle of Shaubak around noon on Sunday and there he pitched his tents. Princes of Beni ʿOqbah and other Arab princes

attended on him and presented horses and camels and other gifts. He moved from Shaubak Monday at noon by the road of Hasa and arrived at Karak on Tuesday 23rd of the month⁷

On Friday the 27th, Baibars went out to the citadel's entrance and assembled the plotters. There were, according to the chronicler, around 600 men. He ordered them to be hung, but his companions interceded. He then cut off the hands and feet of six men who were responsible for the insurrection, on alternate sides, according to the Islamic law.

The whole journey from Cairo to Karak lasted only eleven days, to the surprise of the plotters. It is interesting to note that there is no Pharaonic reference in Nuwairi's account of the Petra monuments; his silence here suggests that names such as Khazanet Fir'aun, Qasr Bint Fir'aun etc . . . are modern. But the Biblical and Koranic beliefs align in that Medieval period. They originate from Jewish, Christian and Muslim holy scriptures, in connection with the Exodus⁵². In the Koran, many passages refer to the mission of Moses and Aaron, especially in Sourat II and XX. Since Petra lies on the main caravan route to Egypt, it is quite understandable why the Biblical narratives of the Exodus were transferred to the site as early as the first century AD as it appears in Josephus, *Antiquities* IV: 82: 'Moses led his forces away through the desert and came to a place in Arabia which the Arabs have deemed their metropolis, formerly called Arken, today named Petra.' (Loeb Classics). Following Eusebius's Onomasticon⁵³ (4th century AD), the Byzantines built a memorial to Aaron on the mountain they considered Mt Ḥor, restored later by the Mamluks.⁵⁴ The Christian pilgrim Thetmar (1217) alludes to the site as Petra⁵⁵ but the Franks called it 'Li Vaux Moyses' (the Valley of Moses).

Along with Nuwairi, al-Dawadâri also reports a site which is believed by some orientologists to be Petra. The episode

recounts the adventure of some twelve Mamluk horsemen (Baibars was among them⁵⁶ before he became Sultan of Egypt). They fled from Cairo in 1254–55, during the reign of the above-mentioned el-Mo'ezz Aibak, and after wandering in the wilderness (el-Tih) for six days, they happened to come upon a 'city whose walls and gates were all of green glass⁵⁷. In this city, shops and markets were buried in the sand; they found in one abandoned shop nine gold dinars struck with 'a gazelle surrounded by a Hebrew [*sic*] inscription'. As they met bedouins of the tribe of Beni Mahdi from Karak, they were led to the city, where they showed the dinars to a changer. He was surprised and asked them where they came from. When they described the site, he exclaimed: 'This is the green city built with green glass instead of stones, when Moses, peace be upon him, was wandering in the desert'⁵⁸. This legendary account is full of fantasy but may indicate, if it refers to Petra, as asserted by Quatremère⁵⁹, the impression that this city made on the imagination of people in the medieval period, before the European travellers; it is at any rate evidence that this caravan station never disappeared from the memory of the Arab chroniclers.

In August 1812, Johannes L. Burckhardt, alias Sheikh Ibrahim bin 'Abdallah, commissioned by the British Association to discover the 'Inner parts of Africa', arrived through the King's Highway to Wadi Musa (el-Jî), riding from Karak. He was permitted to cross the ancient city under the pretext of a vow to sacrifice to the Prophet Aaron and was met with justified suspicion when he was trying to examine the ruins of Qasr el-Bint. He did not reach Jebel Harûn, but after his short visit he was able to conclude: 'In comparing the testimonies of the authors cited in Reland's *Palaestina*, it appears very probable that the ruins in Wady Mousa are those of the ancient Petra'⁶⁰. The real discovery of Burckhardt was simply to connect the classical texts and the ruins he had rapidly passed.

⁵² For the different traditions see G. Ebers, *Durch Gosen zum Sinai*, Leipzig, 1881, p. 409–438.

⁵³ S. v. Hor: 'It is the mountain near Petra where Aaron died'; see J. Starcky, *Dic. Bib. Sup.* VII, col. 899.

⁵⁴ For a survey of the site see *Die Provincia Arabia*, IB, Strassburg, 1904, p. 419ff.

⁵⁵ J. Starcky, *op. cit.*, col. 923.

⁵⁶ Al-Dawadâri, *kanz el-durar*, *op. cit.* p. 28.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 26–28.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 28.

⁵⁹ *Histoire des Sultans Mamloukes de l'Égypte*, *op. cit.*, p. 49, note 71: 'Je n'ai pas besoin d'insister ici pour faire comprendre que les ruines dont il est question appartenaient à la ville de Pétra'. But other sites close to Karak such as Feinan and its area, famous for the copper mines, could be candidates for the site of the 'Green City'.

⁶⁰ *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*, London, 1822, p. 431.

Appendix A

The voyage of Sultan Baibars from Cairo to Karak with the description of Jebel Badr and Petra. Al-Nuwairi's manuscript No. 1578 in Paris.

مخطوطة المكتبة الوطنية في باريس

رقم ١٥٧٨

موسى بن عمران عليها السلام على يسره السالك المتوجه الى الشام. وثم قلعة تعرف بالاصويت صعدها السلطان وشاهدها فوجدها من اعجب الحصون وامنعها لا يكون احصن منها. فنزل من ثقب الرباعي الى مدائن بني اسرائيل وهي ثقب في الجبال من احسن الاشكال. ذات بيوت بالعمد وابواب. وظواهر البيوت مصوقة بالنقوش في الحجارة بالازميل كلها مخرمة بها صور اشكال. وهي على قدر دور الناس المبنية الآن.

وداخل هذه البيوت الاواوين المعقودة والصنف المتقابلة والخزائن والدهاليز والحرميات. وليس ذلك مبنى بل جميعها منحوت بالحديد اشكال المغاير. قال وقد خلق الله تعالى جبلين متقابلين بينهما طريق وكل جبل منهما كأنه شكل سور مرتفع والدور متصلة يميناً وشمالاً.

ثم خرج السلطنة (السلطان) من تلك الامكنة الى وادي المدره ثم منه الى قرية تعرف بالعدما عرفت بذلك لان بها العين التي نخسها موسى بن عمران عليه السلام بعصاه وكانت تجري دما. فقال: عد بأمر الله ماء عذبا فعادت العين ماء حلوا رانقا باردا. فبات السلطان بها ورحل منها ليلة السبت حادي عشرين الشهر فوصل الى قلعة الشوبك نصف نهار الاحد وخيم هناك. وحضر امراء بني عقبة وغيرهم من امراء العربان وقدموا الخيول والهجن وغير ذلك. ثم رحل من الشوبك نصف نهار الاثنين على طريق الحسا فوصل الكرك نصف نهار الثلاثاء ثالث عشرين الشهر. قال: لما كان في سابع وعشرين الشهر يوم الجمعة خرج السلطان الى باب قلعة الكرك واحضر رجالها. وذكر من خبر اخراجهم نحو ما تقدم.

رحل السلطان من قلعته يوم الخميس المذكور (١٢ ذي الحجة ٦٧٤ هـ / ٢٨ أيار ١٢٧٦م) فنزل بليس واقام الى قرب وقت العصر. ورحل فنزل رأس الماء بوادي السدير ورحل منه نصف ليلة السبت فنزل الكراع واقام الى غروب الشمس. وحل الماء لكفاية يومين وتوجه على طريق البدرية وساق سوقا عنيفا الى وقت الفجر من يوم الاثنين لم يرح ولم يسترح الا بقدر ما تشرب الخيل الماء وتستوفي العليق فنزل تحت جبل بدر. ثم ركب بعد الاسفار لشدة الوعر فوصل الى بدر ونزل عند العين. وقال وهي عين تخرج من جبل اخضر ليس فيه نبات منبعها من جهة الغرب تحت جبل شاهق. وهي شكل مغارة منقوبة يدخل الانسان فيها مقدار عشرة خطى فيجد عينا تنبع عن يسره الداخل اليها. وكان السلطان قبل وصوله الى العين قد بعث جماعه من العرب امرهم ان يجمعوا من ماء العين ويكون حاصله للورود فصنعوا حول العين حياضا في الارض شكل البرك محوطة بالحجارة وملاؤها من ماء العين. فور [د]ها السلطان ومن معه وارتفقوا بها ولولا ذلك لهلكوا من الازدحام على الماء. ثم دخل السلطان بنفسه الى المغارة وجلس عند العين. وكان يملاً لمن معه قربهم بيده ويناول كل قربة لصاحبها حتى ملاءوا ما معهم. ثم رحل من بدر فنزل حسنة وهي بئر واحدة ورحل منها حتى انتهى الى عين تعرف بالمليحة فورها ورحل وبات تحت جبل يعرف بنقب الرباعي.

فلما اسفر الصبح صعد الجبل واذا هو جبل عظيم به عقاب صعبه وهي حجارة رخوة تشبه الرمل المتجمد متغيرة الالوان الى الحمرة والزرقة والبياض وثم ثقب في الجبل يعبر الراكب منها. وبها امكنة تشبه السلام من حجارة وبها قبر هرون نبي الله اخي

Appendix B

English translation of Sultan Baibar's voyage from Cairo to Karak with the description of Jebel Badr and Petra. Al-Nuwairi's manuscript No. 1578 in Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

'The Sultan departed from his Citadel (Qal'at el-Jabal) on the above-mentioned Thursday (12th Dhul-Hijja, 674 H. = 28th May, 1276) and halted at Belbeis where he rested until the mid-afternoon. He remounted and encamped at Râs el Mâ', in Wadi el-Sadr from which he moved on Saturday, in the middle of the night, and reached Karâ'; he reposed until the setting of the sun. He carried water for two days' provision and set out on the Badriyyah route, continuing his way at a forced march to the dawn of Monday, neither resting nor allowing his companions any repose except that which sufficed to water the horses and take their ration of fodder. He then encamped at the foot of Jabal Badr. He remounted at the first light, so arduous was the track, and reached Badr. He halted at the spring. [Ibn 'Abd el-Zaher] reported it is a green mountain, devoid of any plant. The spring gushed from the West, under a huge mountain, from a rockcut cave. One can enter into it about ten paces and find a fountain on his left hand. Before his arrival, the Sultan had sent a group of bedouins and ordered them to collect from the cave whatever water was available to drink. They prepared around the spring basins dug in the earth, like little pools enclosed by stones, and filled them with water. The Sultan and his companions drew water and took provision. Without this arrangement, they could have perished from the rush to water. The Sultan entered the cave and sat at the mouth of the spring; he himself filled for his companions their water skins and handed them to each one of them, until they filled all they had. He rode on from Badr and halted at Hassana, an isolated well which he left until he reached a spring called Mulaiha where he drew water. He continued his way and pitched his tents at the foot of the mountain known as Naqb el-Rubâ'i.

And thus, at the break of dawn, he ascended the mountain,

and wondrous high it was, cut with tortuous ravines and these of crumbling stones, resemblant unto hardened sand, changing in their hues from red to azure and white; thither also were defiles in the mountains, admitting the horseman riding through, in which are places as though rising steps hewn in the rock. On this mountain is the tomb of Aaron, Prophet of God, the brother of Moses, son of 'Umran, peace upon them, on the left of the traveller whose face is unto Damascus. And hence up a fortress known as al-Aşwît, climbed the Sultan and looked upon it and held it the most awesome of strongholds and among the most puissant. And he descended through the gorge of al-Rubâ'i which windeth through the mountains to the cities of the Children of Israël, amidst most marvelous caves. Those are houses adorned with columns and gates; the façades are sculpted into the very rock face by carving of chisels, all fretted and friezed into decorative living forms as though they were dwellings for people today. And he saith that God almighty created there two parallel mountains cleft in twain by a conduct route hemmed in on either side as by sheer precipitous walls, to the right and left of which rear up the abodes. Then came the Sultan from those places to Wadi el-Madarah and to the village called el-'Odma, known as such for within it lies the spring which Moses son of 'Umrân, peace upon him, struck with his rod that which once flowed with blood. He called on it to change by command of God unto fresh water and lo! it changed unto crystal-clear water, sweet and cool. The Sultan rested there. He retired from thence on the night of Saturday the twenty-first (6th June, 1276) reaching the castle of Shaubak around noon on Sunday and there he pitched his tents. Princes of Beni 'Oqbah and other Arab princes attended on him and presented horses and camels and other gifts. He moved from Shaubak, Monday at noon by the road of Hasa and arrived at Karak on Tuesday 23rd of the month⁶¹. He saith: 'On Friday 27th, the Sultan went out to the Citadel's gate and assembled its garrison. And [Ibn 'Abd el-Zaher] reported the above mentioned account about their expulsion from the Citadel.'

⁶¹ In fact Tuesday is 24th Dhul-Hijja.

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ثم ركب بعد الاسفار لسلك الوعر فوصل الى مدر و برل عند العين قال وهي
 من مخرج من جبل احضرت منه ثبات مسعها من جهة الغرب تحت جبل ساهموت
 وهي شكل مغارة منقوبه يدخل الانسان فيها بعد ارضه خطي فخذ عشا يسع عن لسه
 الداخل اليها وكان السلطان قبل وصوله الى العين بدعت حيا من العرب امرهم
 ان يحموا بين ما العين ويكون حاصل اللوز ودهنوا حول العين خاضا في الارض سلك
 البرك موطه بالحجارة وملاوا ما بين ما العين بوزها السلطان ومن معه وارتفعوا اليها
 ولولا ذلك لهلكوا من الجوع والحمام على الماء ثم دخل السلطان نفسه الى المغارة وحلست عند
 العين وكان ملامن معه قريتهم سلك وناول كل فرسه لصاحبها حتى ملاوا واما معهم ثم رحل
 من مدر رحل حسنة وهي من واطك ورحل منها حتى انتهى الى تعرف تا ليلحه فوردها ورحل
 ويات تحت جبل يعرف سفت الرباعي فلما استمر الصبي صعد الى الجبل واذا هو حصل
 به عتاب صعبه وهي حجارة ونحوه لسه المرسل المجهد منقوره الالوان الى الحرم والرفه
 والساض وسم يعوب في الجبل بعير الراكب منها وها امكنه لسه الاستلام لم
 من حجاره وها قبره من بني الله اخي موسى زعمران علمه مما السلام على نسمة السالك المسوحه
 الى التثام وسم فلعته تعرف بالاصوت صعدت صعدت السلطان و ساهدها فوجدها
 من عجب الحبوب وانعجا لا يكون اخضت منها و نزل من يعوب الرباعي الى مداره من
 بني اسرائيل وهي يعوب في الحال من احسن الاشكال ذات نبوت فالعهد ابواب وطواهر
 السوت مصوره بالقوس في الحجاره بالازمبل كلها محزومه فها صور اشكال وهي على مدر
 دور الناس المبينه الان وداخل هذه النبوت لاوا وبن المعقوده والصعب لهما
 والحزاب والدها ليز والحرمانات وليس ذلك ميتين بكل جمعة منخوت بالحد مد
 اسكال المغاير فالوقد خلق الله تعالى جبلين متقابلين بينهما طريق وكل جبل منهما
 كانه شكل سوز مرتفع والدور منضله معنا ونسلا لا مخرج السلطنة من تلك الامكنه
 الى وادي المجره ثم منه الى قرية تعرف بالعد ما عرفت بذلك لان لها العين التي حنساها
 موسى زعمران علمه السلام بصاه وكان شجرى دما فقال بعد ما مره ما عدا ما عادت
 العين ما حلوا رايها ما ردا مات السلطان فها ورحل منها لسه التست خادي عمن
 السه فوصل خلا فلعده السوك صفت فها را الاحد وحجم هناك وحضر امرا بن اعينه وعمرم
 من امرا الى اعرمان ودموا الحبول والهم وعبرته لك ثم رحل من السوك صفت فها را
 الالمان على طريق الحسا فوصل الى الكرك صفت فها را السلكا ما لسه من السه والاكاد