CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Among the geographical texts in the Pentateuch the wilderness itineraries form a group which provide especially precise information and share an unusually similar structure.[1] The longest and most complete example is found in Num. 33: 1–49, but parallels to parts of this passage exist in a series of isolated verses in the main narrative of Exodus and Numbers, which show agreement with it in content and structure, and often in verbal details as well (e.g. Ex. 12: 37a).[2] Shorter itineraries are to be found in Num. 21: 12–20 and Dt. 10: 6–7. These passages belong, from the point of view of their form, to a widely attested literary genre of the ancient world, which survives mainly in official documents. It is probable that this way of presenting a route was borrowed by the writers of the Old Testament from the repertoire of the archives of the Israelite royal court.

In view of their primary function – which is to describe routes – it is only to be expected that the geographical significance of the wilderness itineraries would be a topic of continuing interest to readers and interpreters of the books in which they occur. It is certainly this aspect of the texts which has received the greatest attention from scholars in the modern period, to the neglect, it must be said, of other features such as their formal characteristics. Even in earlier periods there were powerful forces which, in differing degrees in different situations, provided a stimulus for the geographical approach. The existence of a developed topographical science in both classical antiquity and among the medieval Arabs contributed a framework and an environment in which it was natural for the identification of places mentioned in the Bible to be attempted. Again, the popularity of pilgrimages to the Holy Land and neighbouring

areas from the fourth century AD onwards encouraged an interest in such questions within Christian circles, and it is certainly to this practice of pilgrimage that we owe the preservation at least of a great deal of traditional material bearing on our subject.[3] In Rabbinic Judaism a further factor required a geographical approach to some texts: the need, for halakhic purposes, to define the limits of 'the land of Israel'.[4]

At the same time it would be wrong to suppose that the topographical approach to the itineraries was dominant in early Jewish and Christian interpretation. There was, at least from the time of Philo onwards, an influential tradition of 'spiritual interpretation', which was more concerned with the amplification of what happened at the places named and with the treatment of this as a symbol of spiritual reality than with their identification in terms of current geographical knowledge. The Biblical commentaries used by both Jews and Christians until quite modern times contained only matter directed towards this edifying treatment of the texts, and are consequently of little immediate interest for our present inquiry. They would however provide plentiful material for a quite separate examination of the role played by the itineraries in Jewish and Christian spirituality.[5]

It is nevertheless with geography that we are concerned here. In previous treatments of the wilderness itineraries two lines of inquiry have generally and understandably been interwoven.[6] To what routes, on the one hand, have the itineraries traditionally been thought to refer? On the other hand, to which routes were they originally intended to refer? We propose to keep these two approaches to the texts apart in the first instance. By doing this we hope to do more justice than is usually done to the history of the tradition (or rather, traditions) of interpretation as a subject in its own right; and also to avoid the common tendency to overlook the presuppositions on which individual identifications in the tradition are based. It is only when the tradition and its own processes of development have been investigated that its value for a modern historical (or historico-geographical) inquiry can be adequately assessed.

One problem that quickly emerges in connection with the tradition is the paucity of material that is available for the most ancient period. This might simply be due to the selection of certain traditions (from a more abundant corpus) by the writers of the works that happen to survive. But probably it points to a situation in which a complete series of identifications had not yet been arrived at. Even the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius (on which see further below, pp. 30–7), which apparently gives as much topographical information as he could discover, frequently says no more about places in the wilderness than σταθμὸς τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ ἐπὶ τῆς ἐρήμου. Whatever the reason, we are often not in a position to cite as much information as we should like. In what follows it will be necessary to mention more general indications of where the Israelites were thought to have travelled, which are not always directly related to the itineraries themselves. This should not be misleading, since until modern times it was generally held that all the data in Exodus and Numbers referred to the same route (hence the need felt for the harmonisations found at some points in the Samaritan Pentateuch, the LXX and the Targumim). An interpretation of the route based on non-itinerary material will still indicate the background against which the itineraries were being read and understood.

CHAPTER 2

JEWISH INTERPRETATIONS IN GREEK

The Jewish material may for convenience be divided into two parts according to the language in which it was written: Greek in the one case, Hebrew or Aramaic in the other. An important corollary of this linguistic division is the use by the one group of Greek versions of the Old Testament, while the other group works primarily from the Hebrew text. The division according to language also corresponds to a chronological division, as the Greek material dates chiefly from before 100 AD, while the Hebrew and Aramaic texts are later, although they may contain traditions which originated before this date. Although we adopt this division of the material, we do not imply that there is no contact between the two groups of texts. In fact our study confirms that at certain points there is indeed contact between them.[1]

THE SEPTUAGINT

Only occasionally does the LXX itself indicate the direction in which the Israelites were thought to have gone. Most of the Hebrew names are simply transliterated or (occasionally) translated, and variations from MT can be explained by textual corruption in either the Hebrew or the Greek stage of transmission. It is possible that in some cases the LXX preserves the names more accurately than does MT. At one point (Num. 33: 36) the fuller text of most LXX witnesses must be attributed to a secondary harmonisation of the passage to make it agree with a statement earlier in the narrative (Num. 13: 26 (LXX v. 27)). The renderings of itinerary-material which show an interest in geographical interpretation all relate to Egypt or its borders, and serve to locate the starting-point of the journey, the encampment by 'the sea' and the actual sea that was crossed.

Rameses itself is not given a Greek equivalent, but it is vocalised in such a way as to approximate more closely in LXX than in MT to the Egyptian pronunciation. But in Gen. 45–7 (cf. especially 47: 11) 'the land of Rameses' occurs as an alternative description to 'the land of Goshen' for the area occupied by Jacob and his family. (In fact in Gen. 46: 28 LXX has εἰς γῆν Ραμεσση corresponding to the ארצה גשן of MT). The identification of Goshen does seem to have been a concern of the translator. In two verses where MT has בארץ גשן LXX interprets with ἐν γῇ Γεσεμ ἀΑραβίας/-ίᾳ (Gen. 45: 10; 46: 34). Ἀραβία is here not used to refer to Arabia proper but to a region in the north-east of Egypt, either the 'Arabian' nome itself (nome XX) or a wider area corresponding more or less to the whole isthmus of Suez.[2] Apparently Goshen is regarded by the translator as equivalent to either a part or the whole of one of these areas. In two other passages of Genesis (46: 28, 29) גשן (in fact with the directional suffix ־ה) appears without ארץ, and here the translator took it to be the name of a city and rendered it by the name of Hellenistic Heroopolis, which epigraphic evidence shows to have been located at or near Tell el-Maskhuta in Wadi Tumilat.[3] Thus the area occupied by the Israelites before the Exodus is fixed by the use of contemporary geographical terms as being around this site and Rameses was presumably thought to be nearby.[4] As will appear, later tradition knew of more exact locations than this for the starting-point of the journey.

The encampment by the sea is located by reference to three places, Pi-hahiroth, Migdol and Baal-zephon (Ex. 14: 2, 9; Num. 33: 7). The LXX translator of Exodus gave as the equivalent for Pi-hahiroth ἡ ἔπαυλις, which means according to *LSJ* (1) 'steading' (2), 'farm-building', (3) '(military) quarters', (4) 'unwalled village'. Elsewhere in the LXX the word is used chiefly of unprotected settlements and is most often equivalent to Hebrew חצר.[5] It is difficult to regard it as a translation of the name 'Pi-hahiroth', and the apparatuses of *BH*[3] and *BHS* suggest that instead of החירת the *Vorlage* of LXX may have had חצרת. There are several difficulties with this view, not

the least being that the translator seems only to have translated Hebrew names when this was necessary to bring out a play on words in the Hebrew, as in 15: 23 and 17: 7. It is more likely that he was referring to a contemporary tradition which identified Pi-hahiroth with a place called in Greek Ἡ Ἔπαυλις. Though it might seem improbable for such a word to be used as a proper name, there is evidence of just such a use of it in papyri.[6] Unfortunately the location of the place can no longer be established with certainty. But Etheria mentions a place called Epauleum near Clysma (*Peregrinatio* 7.4), which was apparently equated with Pi-hahiroth in the fourth century AD, and it is possible that this is the place to which LXX referred.[7]

It has become a commonplace of modern Biblical scholarship that the Hebrew ים סוף does not *mean* 'the Red Sea' but 'the sea of reeds'.[8] It has consequently been questioned whether 'the sea' of the book of Exodus was the Red Sea (i.e. the Gulf of Suez) after all. The LXX translator is quite clear in his belief that it was, since in his version ἡ ἐρυθρὰ θάλασσα is the regular equivalent to ים סוף (cf. Ex. 13: 18; 15: 4, 22). Since there is no evidence of this name having been used of the Mediterranean Sea or the northern lakes in ancient times, however vague popular views of its southerly and easterly extent may have been, there can be no doubt that LXX located the deliverance at the sea to the south of the isthmus of Suez, presumably in what is known now as the Gulf of Suez.

PHILO

The voluminous writings of Philo Judaeus do little to amplify this meagre evidence of an Alexandrian tradition of geographical interpretation. Philo was of course primarily interested in the Old Testament for its didactic and symbolic value. He uses 'Heroopolis' for גשן in the place corresponding to Gen. 46: 28–9 (*De Jos.* 256) and he regularly represents ים סוף by ἡ ἐρυθρὰ θάλασσα (*De Vita Mos.* 1.165, etc.). These equations are obviously due to the fact that the LXX was Philo's Bible. He speaks of the beginning of the Israelites' route

as not the straight road, which would have brought them into Canaan in three days (?) but one at an angle to it (ibid. 1.163–5), which he later describes as a long road through the desert not normally used (ibid. 2.247). This is little more than intelligent amplification of Ex. 13: 17–18.

The only point at which Philo's exegesis presupposes further research is in the location of the battle with Amalek (Ex. 17: 8–13) close to the borders of the land to be occupied by Israel, 'which was then occupied by Phoenicians' (ibid. 2.214ff). The general idea that the Amalekites lived on the borders of Canaan could have been deduced from a number of Old Testament passages (e.g. 1 Sam. 27: 8) but it is remarkable to find 'Phoenicians' mentioned, as they lived much further to the north than any place which Philo can have had in mind. In fact it is Philo's utter dependence on LXX which can be shown to be responsible. In Ex. 16: 35, immediately before the narration of the two Rephidim incidents, it is said that Israel 'ate the manna, till they came to the border of the land of Canaan'. For the last clause LXX has:

ἕως παρεγένοντο εἰς μέρος τῆς Φοινίκης.

The use of Φοινίκη for the כנען of MT is unusual though not quite unparalleled.[9] Philo evidently thought that the manna was eaten only as far as the next stopping-place after the Wilderness of Sin to be mentioned, i.e. Rephidim, and that it was this which was in 'Phoenicia'.

JOSEPHUS

Josephus, as a historian, not surprisingly displays more interest than Philo in the Israelites' route. In fact he gives rather different versions of the beginning of the route in the *Antiquities* and in the *Contra Apionem*, but in view of the apologetic character of the latter work we may confidently regard the account in the *Antiquities* as containing the results of Josephus' own research into the Biblical text and local traditions. The *Contra Apionem* is however of considerable interest for the light which it sheds on other contemporary views of the route of the Exodus, and cannot be ignored here.

Josephus is not dependent on LXX to the extent that Philo is. There are many places where he has a different transcription of a proper name from LXX, and occasionally he offers an improved translation of MT.[10] At the same time his transcriptions sometimes agree with LXX against MT, and he interprets 'Goshen' in Gen. 46: 28–9 as the ancient name of Heroopolis, just like LXX.[11] This may seem to justify the view that Josephus had direct access to the Hebrew text but also referred to LXX.[12] But the 'improvements' on LXX may be due not to Josephus making his own Greek translation but to the use of the revisions of LXX which recent textual study has shown to have been in existence already in the first century AD.[13] Indeed it has long been recognised that in the later books of the Old Testament, where the evidence is clearer, Josephus often shows knowledge of readings which diverge from the unrevised LXX and appear later in manuscripts affected by the Lucianic recension. The fact that this is not so clear in the Pentateuch may be due to the fact that the evidence of the revisions of LXX is much sparser there.[14]

The point from which, according to Josephus, the itinerary begins is indirectly indicated by what he says about the settlement of Jacob and his family in Egypt. According to *AJ* 2.188 this was 'in Heliopolis'. This apparently represents a different tradition from that known to LXX, though it is interesting to observe that LXX too introduces Heliopolis into the Exodus account, against MT, in the list of 'store-cities' in Ex. 1: 11.[15] While it may well be correct to recognise the influence of a Jewish community in Heliopolis in these innovations, a Biblical basis for at least Josephus' reference to Heliopolis could be found in Gen. 45: 10, where Joseph says that his family shall be 'near' him, and Gen. 41: 50–2, which could be taken as implying that Joseph's home was at On, known in Hellenistic times as Heliopolis. A starting-point for the journey at a place close to modern Cairo, like the site of Heliopolis, is essential if the rest of Josephus' interpretation of the beginning of the route is to be intelligible.

Josephus relates that Israel went by way of Letopolis, which

was not occupied at the time of the Exodus (*AJ* 2.315). He appears from what he says about it to have held that Letopolis was the same place as the Babylon built in the time of Cambyses of Persia. This lay on the eastern bank of the Nile about 10 miles (16 km) south of Heliopolis. From here the Israelites are supposed to have gone by a short cut (συντόμως) to the Red Sea, reaching it on the third day, as the Biblical account suggests if each stage is taken to last just one day. The route taken seems to have led south of Jebel Attaqa and to have reached the sea south-west of Ras el-Adabiyeh. The journey via Letopolis/Babylon would have involved a quite pointless detour to the south if it were eventually intended to take a more northerly route; and only the view adopted here makes sense of Josephus' very circumstantial account of the events leading up to the crossing of the sea (*AJ* 2.324–5). The passage is of sufficient interest to be quoted in full:

τὰς δὲ ὁδοὺς ἀπεφράγνυσαν [sc. the Egyptians], αἷς φεύξεσθαι τοὺς Ἑβραίους ὑπελάμβανον, μεταξὺ κρημνῶν αὐτοὺς ἀπροσβάτων καὶ τῆς θαλάττης ἀπολαμβάνοντες· τελευτᾷ γὰρ εἰς αὐτὴν ὄρος ὑπὸ τραχύτητος ὁδῶν ἄπορον καὶ φυγῆς ἀπολαμβανόμενον. τοιγαροῦν ἐν τῇ εἰσβολῇ τῇ πρὸς θάλατταν τοῦ ὄρους τοὺς Ἑβραίους ἀπέφραττον τῷ στρατοπέδῳ κατὰ στόμα τοῦτο ἱδρυσάμενοι, ὅπως τὴν εἰς τὸ πεδίον ἔξοδον ὦσιν αὐτοὺς ἀφῃρημένοι.

The Israelites were trapped between a mountain and the sea, where there was only a narrow passable strip of land, which they would have to traverse to get safely away, to the πεδίον. The Egyptians overtook them and blocked this way of escape with their army. In several respects this description goes far beyond what is narrated in Ex. 14, not least in the introduction of the all-important mountain. There is no need now to try to establish how this expansion of the Exodus narrative arose, although it may be significant that certain Rabbinic explanations of the name Pi-hahiroth imply that it was a place close to a mountainous region. The only place by the Red Sea that really comes into consideration is where Jebel Attaqa terminates in the promontory of Ras el-Adabiyeh. If this is the right place, then the nature of the Egyptians' strategy demands that the Israelites be on the south side of the promontory, hoping

apparently to make their way around the north end of the Gulf of Suez. If they were approaching the seaward end of Jebel Attaqa from the north they would be aiming in quite the wrong direction.

After crossing the 'Red Sea' the Israelites made for Mount Sinai (*AJ* 3.1). Josephus does not give such a precise account of this part of the route – which may mean that this was not such a great concern of contemporary tradition as the location of places connected with the Exodus itself. What he does say can be, and has been, taken as evidence that he knew nothing of the tradition that Mount Sinai was in the south of the Sinai peninsula. The main points are his association of the Amalekites who appear at Rephidim, the stopping-place before Sinai, with Petra and Gobolitis (*AJ* 3.40 – cf. 2.6); and the representation of the 'Midian' to which Moses fled as a city on or near to the Red Sea (*AJ* 2.256–7), by which he probably meant one of the places of that name located by Ptolemy in north-west Arabia (*Geography* 6.7.2, 27). In addition the name 'Paran', which later was identified with the place Faran in the south of the Sinai peninsula, is simply given a Hellenised form by Josephus (Φάραγξ, meaning 'a ravine') and said to be close to Canaan (*AJ* 3.300), as the Biblical narrative would suggest.

It has therefore been suggested that for Josephus Mount Sinai was in north-west Arabia.[16] There is an obstacle to this theory in the one statement about the location of Mount Sinai itself which Josephus does make: he says that it is 'between Egypt and Arabia' (*Contra Apionem* 2.25). This is difficult to reconcile with its being in Arabia proper. It suggests that Josephus had a more westerly area in mind, in fact what is now known as the Sinai peninsula. The description of Mount Sinai which he gives in *AJ* 3.76 suggests that he knew of a particular peak which was identified with Sinai. But where in the peninsula was it? The statements about the Amalekites and Midian quoted above would be most compatible with a tradition which located Mount Sinai somewhere in the north-east of the peninsula, perhaps as far north as Jebel Araif. But to argue from them is to assume that Josephus had carefully coordinated