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Arthur Penrhyn Stanley  
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## CHAPTER I.



PART I.—PENINSULA OF SINAI.

PART II.—THE JOURNEY FROM CAIRO TO JERUSALEM.

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Exodus xiv. 13. "The Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever."

Deut. viii. 15. "That great and terrible wilderness . . . where there was no water."

Deut. xxxiii. 2. "The Lord came from Sinai and rose up from Seir unto them: He shined forth from Mount Paran; and he came with the ten thousands ['of Kadesh,' LXX]."

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## PART I.

### PENINSULA OF SINAI.

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# SINAI

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## PART I.

### PENINSULA OF SINAI.

THE Peninsula of Mount Sinai is, geographically and geologically speaking, one of the most remarkable districts on the face of the earth. It combines the three grand features of earthly scenery—the sea, the desert, and the mountains. It occupies also a position central to three countries, distinguished, not merely for their history, but for their geography amongst all other nations of the world—Egypt, Arabia, Palestine. And lastly, it has been the scene of a history as unique as its situation; by which the fate of the three nations which surround it, and through them the fate of the whole world, has been determined.

It is a just remark of Chevalier Bunsen, that “Egypt has, properly speaking, no history. History was born on that night when Moses led forth his people from Goshen.” Most fully is this felt as the traveller emerges from the Valley of the Nile, the study of the Egyptian monuments, and finds himself on the broad track of the Desert. In those monuments, magnificent and instructive as they are, he sees great kings, and mighty deeds—the father, the son, and the children,—the sacrifices, the conquests, the coronations. But there is no before and after, no unrolling of a great drama, no beginning, middle, and end of a moral progress, or even of a mournful decline. In the Desert, on the contrary, the moment the green

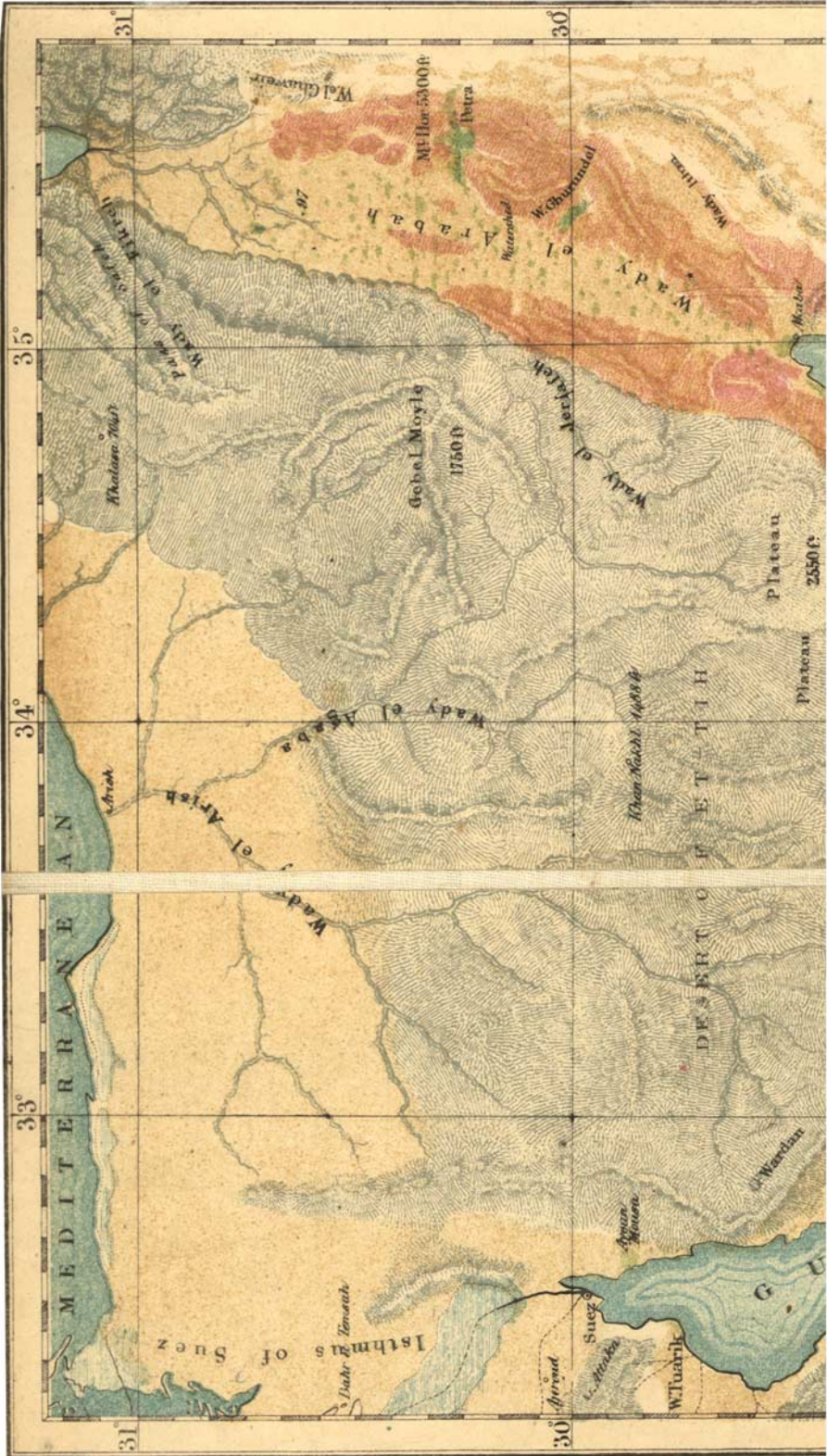
fields of Egypt recede from our view, still more when we reach the Red Sea, the further and further we advance into the Desert and the mountains, we feel that everything henceforward is continuous, that there is a sustained and protracted interest, increasing more and more, till it reaches its highest point in Palestine, in Jerusalem, on Calvary, and on Olivet. And in the desert of Sinai this interest is enhanced by the fact that there it stands alone. Over all the other great scenes of human history,—Palestine itself, Egypt, Greece, and Italy,—successive tides of great recollections have rolled, each to a certain extent obliterating the traces of the former. But in the Peninsula of Sinai there is nothing to interfere with the effect of that single event. The Exodus is the one only stream of history that has passed through this wonderful region,—a history which has for its background the whole magnificence of Egypt, and for its distant horizon the forms, as yet unborn, of Judaism, of Mahometanism, of Christianity.

It is this district, which, for the sake of, and in connection with that history, it is here proposed briefly to describe.

I. The great limestone range of Syria, which begins in the north from Lebanon and extends through the whole of Palestine, terminates on the south in a wide tableland, which reaches eastward far into Arabia Petræa, and westward far into Africa. At the point where this rocky mass descends from Palestine, another element falls in, which at once gives it a character distinct from mountainous tracts in other parts of the world; namely, that waterless region of the earth, which extends from the shores of the Atlantic to those of the Persian Gulf, under the familiar name of the Desert. But its character, both as a wilderness and as a mountain country, is broken by three great clefts, which divide its several portions from each other. The westernmost of these clefts is the deep valley, which descending from the mountains of Abyssinia contains the course of the solitary, mysterious, and majestic river, with the green strip of verdure lining its banks, which forms the land of Egypt. The second runs almost parallel to this—the bed not of a fertilising stream, but of a desolate sea,—the Arabian Gulf of the Greeks, the Gulf of Suez in modern geography. The third and eastern-

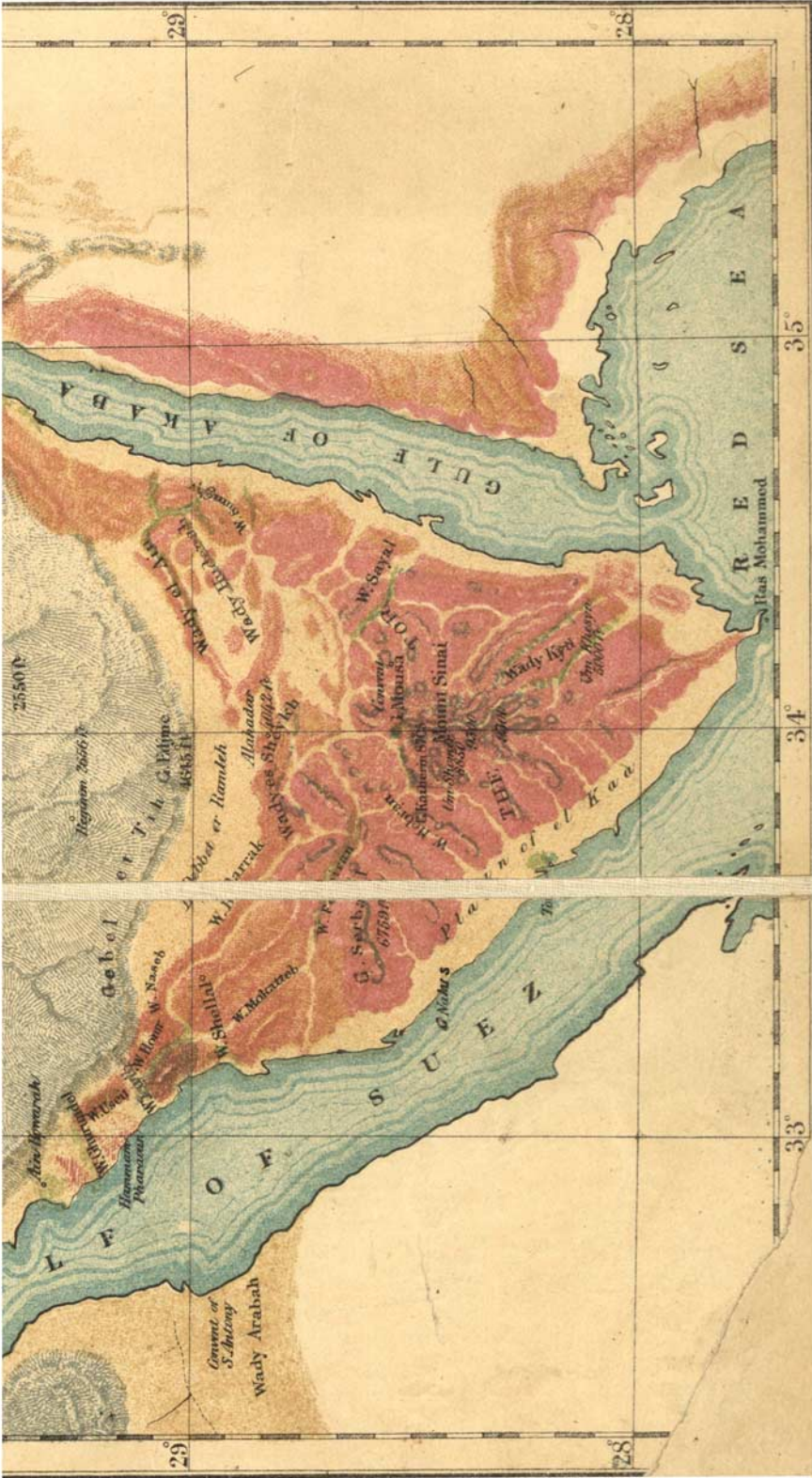
General  
 configura-  
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most cleft at its southern extremity is similar in character to the second, and forms the Elanitic Gulf of the Greeks, the modern Gulf of 'Akaba; but further north it passes into the deep and wide valley of the 'Arabah, which in turn communicates with the still deeper valley of the Jordan, running up into the heart of the mountains of Lebanon, the original basis from which the whole of the system takes its departure.

1. It is between those two gulfs, the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of 'Akaba, that the Peninsula of Sinai lies. From them it derives its contact with the sea, and therefore with the world; which is one striking distinction between it and the rest of the vast desert of which it forms a part. From hardly any point in the Sinaitic range is the view of the sea wholly excluded; from the highest points both of its branches are visible; its waters, blue with a depth of colour more like that of some of the Swiss lakes than of our northern or midland seas, its tides imparting a life to the dead landscape,—familiar to modern travellers from the shores of the Atlantic or German Ocean, but strange and inexplicable to the inhabitants of the ancient world, whose only knowledge of the sea was the vast tideless lake which washed the coasts of Egypt, Palestine, Greece, and Italy. It must have always brought to the mind of those who stood on its shores, that they were on the waters of a new, and almost unknown, world. Those tides come rolling in from the vast Indian Ocean; and with the Indian Ocean these two gulfs are the chief channels of communication from the Northern world. The white shells which strew their shores, the forests of submarine vegetation which gave the whole sea its Hebrew appellation of the “Sea of Weeds,” the trees of coral, whose huge trunks may be seen even on the dry shore, with the red rocks and red sand, which especially in the Gulf of 'Akaba bound its sides,—all bring before us the mightier mass of the Red or Erythræan<sup>1</sup> Ocean, the coral strands of the Indian Archipelago,

The Two  
Gulfs of  
the Red  
Sea.

<sup>1</sup> The appellation “Red Sea,” as applied distinctively to the two gulfs of Suez and 'Akaba, is comparatively modern. It seems to have been applied to them only as continuations of the Indian Ocean, to which the name of the

Erythræan or Red Sea was given, at a time when the two gulfs were known to the Hebrews only by the name of the “Sea of Weeds,” and to the Greeks by the name of the Bays of Arabia and Elath. This in itself makes it probable

of which these two gulfs with their peculiar products are the northern offshoots. The Peninsula itself has been the scene of but one cycle of human events. But it has, through its two watery boundaries, been encircled with two tides of history, which must not be forgotten in the associations which give it a foremost place in the geography and history of the world; two tides, never flowing together, one falling as the other rose, but imparting to each of the two barren valleys through which they flow a life and activity hardly less than that which has so long animated the valley of the Nile. The two great lines of Indian traffic have alternately passed up the eastern and the western gulf; and, though unconnected with the greater events of the Peninsula of Sinai, the commerce of Alexandria and the communications of England with India, which now pass down the Gulf of Suez, are not without interest, as giving a lively image of the ancient importance of the twin Gulf of 'Akaba. That gulf, now wholly deserted, was, in the times of the Jewish monarchy, the great thoroughfare of the fleets of Solomon and Jehoshaphat, and the only point in the second period of their history which brought the Israelites into connection with the scenes of the earliest wanderings of their nation.

Such are the western and eastern boundaries of this mountain tract; striking to the eye of the geographer, as the two parallels to that narrow Egyptian land from which the Israelites came forth: important to the historian, as the two links of Europe and Asia with the great ocean of the south—as the two points

that the name of "Red" was derived from the corals of the Indian Ocean, and makes it impossible that it should have been from "*Edom*,"—the mountains of Edom, as is well known, hardly reaching to the shores of the gulf of 'Akaba, certainly not to the shores of the ocean. "As we emerged from the mouth of a small defile," writes the late Captain Newbold, in describing his visit to the mountain of Nakûs near Tôr, "the waters of this sacred gulf burst upon our view; the surface marked with annular, crescent-shaped, and irregular blotches of a purplish red, extending as far as the eye could reach. They were curiously contrasted with the beautiful aqua-marina of the water lying over the white coral reefs. This red colour I ascertained to

be caused by the subjacent red sandstone and reddish coral reefs; a similar phenomenon is observed in the straits of Babel-Mandeb, and also near Suez, particularly when the rays of the sun fall on the water at a small angle."—*Journ. of R. Asiat. Society*, No. xiii. p. 78. This accurate description is decisive as to the origin of the name, though Captain Newbold draws no such inference. The Hebrew word "*sûph*," though used commonly for "flags" or "rushes," would by an easy change be applied to any aqueous vegetation (see Dietrich's *Abhandlungen*, pp. 17, 23—25); just as Pliny (xiii. 25) speaks of it as "a vast forest;" "*Rubrum mare et totus orientis oceanus refertus est sylvis.*" (Ritter, *Sinai*, 466—482.) See Part II. p. 82.



of contact between the Jewish people and the civilisation of the ancient world. From the summit of Mount St. Catherine, or of Um-Shômer, a wandering Israelite might have seen the beginning and the end of his nation's greatness. On the one side lay the sea through which they had escaped from the bondage of slavery and idolatry—still a mere tribe of the shepherds of the Desert. On the other side lay the sea, up which were afterwards conveyed the treasures of the Indies, to adorn the palace and the temple of the capital of a mighty empire.

2. Of the three geological elements which compose the Peninsula itself<sup>1</sup>, the first and the most extensive is the northern table-land of limestone which is known as the Desert of the "Tih," or the "Wanderings." It is supported and enclosed by long horizontal ranges, which keep this uniform character wherever they are seen. They are the same which, under the name of the Mountains of Râhah, first meet the eye of the traveller approaching Suez from Egypt, as forming the western boundary of the great plateau; the same which, under the name of the Mountains of the Tih, run along its southern border, as seen from Serbâl or St. Catherine; and which, under the same name, form its eastern border, as seen from Mount Hor. However much the other mountains of the Peninsula vary in form or height, the mountains of the Tih are always alike; always faithful to their tabular outline and blanched desolation. It is this which gives them a natural affinity of appearance with the two long limestone walls which confine the traveller's view down the valley of the Nile from Cairo to Thebes; and, again, to the unbroken line of mountains which runs along the eastern side of the Jordan, from the Dead Sea to Mount Hermon<sup>2</sup>.

One solitary station-house and fort marks this wilderness. It probably derives its name of Nakhî, the "Palm," from an adjacent palm-grove, now vanished; a miniature in this respect

<sup>1</sup> For a lucid account of the geology of the Peninsula, I refer to a valuable paper on the subject by Captain Newbold in the *Madras Journal*, vol. xiv. pt. ii.; also to Russegger's map, and to Mr. Hogg's map and paper in *Jameson's Edinburgh Philosophical Journal*, vols. xlviii. p. 193, xlix. p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> The Tih has been traversed and described by Rûppell, Burckhardt, and Bartlett from east to west, and by Robinson from south to north. The passage of the Caravan has been described by Rûppell and Bartlett. I did not see it, except from a distance.

of the midway station for the great Syrian desert—"Tadmor," "Palmyra"—the palm-grove station of Solomon and Zenobia, whence in like manner the palms are now said to have disappeared<sup>1</sup>. It seems to have no peculiar features, beyond the general character of its horizontal hills, and its one wide undulating pebbly plain. If any of the stations of the Israelites mentioned in the Pentateuch were in this portion of the Peninsula, it is useless to seek for them; nor is there apparently any passage or scene in their wanderings which derives any special light from its scenery. Its one interest now is the passage of the Mecca pilgrimage.

3. The plateau of the Tih is succeeded by the sandstone mountains which form the first approach to the higher Sinaitic range, called by the general Arabic name for a high mountain, the "Tôr." One narrow plain<sup>2</sup> or belt of sand, called from that circumstance the "Debbet-er-Ramleh," divides the table-land of the north from these mountains of the south; the hills of the "Tih"—the seat of the tribe thence called "Tiyâha,"—from the hills of the "Tôr," the seat of the tribe thence called "Towâra." From Serbâl and St. Catherine this yellow line of sand is distinctly visible; and seems to be, as its name implies, the only tract of pure sand which the desert of Sinai presents. The name is of itself sufficient to indicate to the experienced geographer, what the traveller soon learns by observation, that sand is properly speaking the exception and not the rule of the Arabian desert. In the usual route from Cairo to Suez, and from Suez to 'Akaba, it occurs only once in any great quantity or depth: namely, in the hills immediately about Huderâh<sup>2</sup>, where, it would seem, the Debbet-er-Ramleh terminates on reaching the sandstone cliffs which here shut off both it and the tableland of the Tih from the Gulf of 'Akaba. There, after traversing the whole Peninsula on hard ground of gravel, pebble, or rock, the traveller again finds himself in the deep sand-drifts which he has not seen

<sup>1</sup> Carne's *Recollections of the East*, vol. ii. p. 545. Is it quite certain that "Tadmor" and "Palmyra" are derived from the *palms*? A palm is in Hebrew "Tamar," and not "Tadmor;" and in Greek (and Josephus says that the Greeks

gave it the name of Palmyra) "Phoenix" (Φοινίξ). See Hitzig; *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, vol. viii. 222.

<sup>2</sup> See Part II. p. 79.