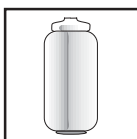


dignity, euthanasia, and the right to suicide. We oppose the increasing invasion of privacy, by whatever means, in both totalitarian and democratic societies. *We would safeguard, extend, and implement the principles of human freedom evolved from the Magna Carta to the Bill of Rights, the Rights of Man, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

This final quotation is most interesting. Not only does it embody liberty and equality, it expounds fraternity as an obligation to democracy. Note also that it concludes by specifically tracing this Humanist Manifesto back, not merely to 1948 (UN Declaration) and the French Revolution, but also to the 1688 Bill of Rights and to the 1215 Magna Carta! This surely confirms the validity of our thesis, that the contemporary manifestation of the three frog spirits is humanism.

(To be concluded)



Prophecy, History and Archaeology

EDITOR: Tony Benson, 26 Tiercel Avenue, Norwich,
NR7 8JN. Tel./Fax 01603 412978;
email: tony.benson3@ntlworld.com

The Sinai Peninsula

1. Roads and routes

David Green

THE AIM OF this seven-part series of articles is to describe a range of features relating to the Sinai Peninsula, and to a lesser extent the adjacent wilderness areas of the Arabah and the Negev. Past and present aspects will be included, together with any Biblical connections, but there will be no detailed examination of the route taken by the Israelites in their wilderness journey. It is hoped that the subjects discussed will be of interest to Bible students, particularly those who may not be very familiar with the area under consideration.

The Sinai Peninsula extends over an area of 23,500 square miles. The Mediterranean bounds it on the north and the Red Sea on the south. The Gulf of Suez and the Suez Canal lie on its west side and the Gulf of 'Aqaba and the Negev Desert on the east. In its greatest extent it is 130 miles from east to west and 240 miles north to south.

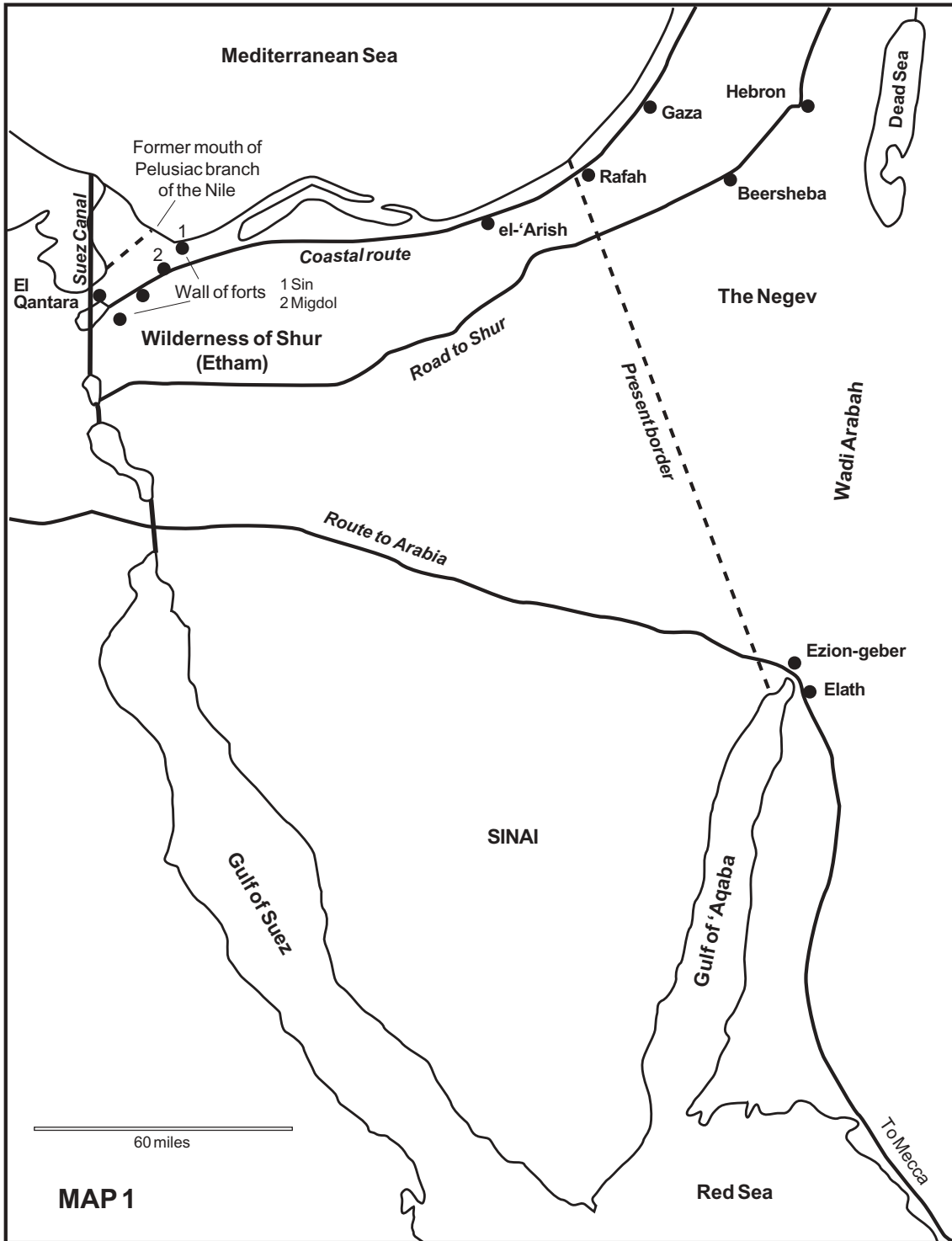
Travel and trade

On the whole, the lack of water, vegetation and shade make the Sinai Peninsula an inhospitable environment for travellers and their animals. Moses describes the area through which the Israelites travelled as "a desert land . . . a barren and howling waste" (Deut. 32:10, NIV). "They wan-

dered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in", says the psalmist (107:4), yet there was sufficient plant growth and water to support the flocks and herds, "large droves of livestock" (Ex. 12:38, NIV), that they brought out of Egypt.

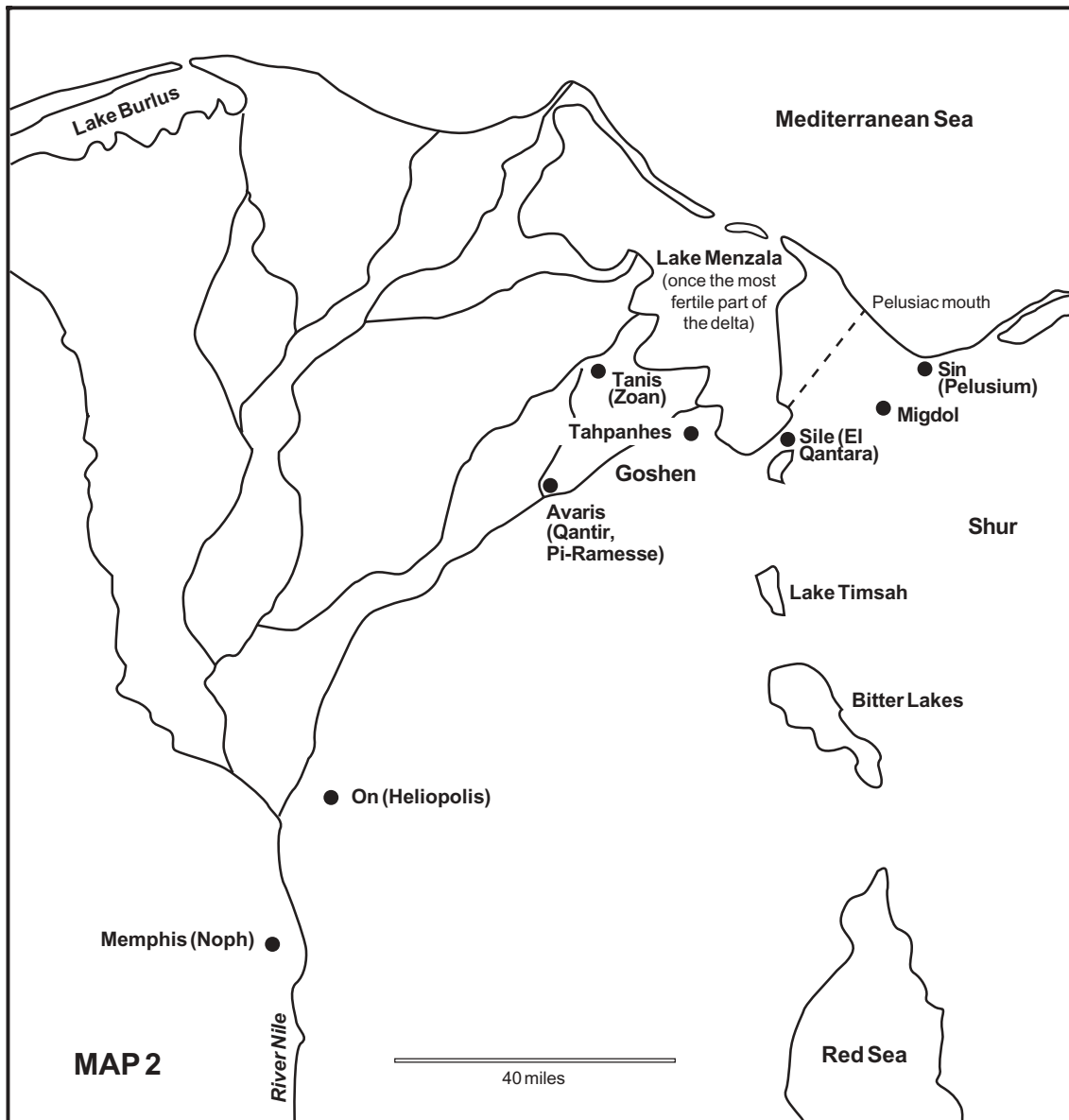
Travel routes crossing Sinai were developed, particularly for the purpose of trade and commerce. Three main overland routes connected Egypt with countries to its north and east (see [Map 1](#)). The most southerly of these linked the area of Egypt just below the Nile Delta with Ezion-geber and Elath at the tip of the Gulf of 'Aqaba arm of the Red Sea (Deut. 2:8; 2 Chron. 20:36) and then continued on to Arabia. This route, running very nearly east-west, roughly divided Sinai into northern and southern halves.

There were two major routes passing through northern Sinai. The easiest of these was the coastal road that led from Egypt to the land of the Philistines, running roughly parallel to the Mediterranean Sea. This is described in Exodus 13:17 as "the way of the land of the Philistines". The children of Israel were prevented from leaving Egypt by this route to avoid the discouragement that would be occasioned by war with the Philis-



tines. A more southerly route called “the road to Shur” (Gen. 16:7, NIV) was a continuation of the highway from the north running through Bethel,

Hebron and Beersheba, and then heading in the direction of the Wilderness of Shur, which lay to the east of Egypt. For most of its length the road



to Shur would be between twenty and thirty-five miles south of the coastal road.

The Egyptians usually controlled the trade routes of Sinai, but the power of Egypt gradually declined, and the Nabateans took control for about two centuries until the Romans defeated them in A.D. 106. Then the region of Sinai became part of the Roman province of Arabia.

The coastal route

From Egypt, the way to the land of the Philistines passes through the northern fringes of the Wilderness of Shur (Ex. 15:22), which is a barren,

sandy desert lying between the line of the Suez Canal and the Wadi el-'Arish (see [Map 1](#)). From el-'Arish the route continues to Rafah (Raphia) and then on to Gaza, passing through areas where cultivation is possible.

Egyptian armies used the coastal route as a military road, and during certain periods asserted authority and maintained wells along the entire length from the border of Egypt to Gaza in the land of the Philistines.¹ Particular military expe-

1. For example, during the nineteenth dynasty, c. 1300 B.C.

ditions mentioned in the Bible are those of Shishak (Shoshenq I),² invading in the fifth year of Rehoboam, circa 925 B.C. (1 Kgs. 14:25), and Pharaoh-necho, in the days of Josiah, 609 B.C. (2 Kgs. 23:29).

Armies invading Egypt from the north also traversed it. It would have been the route taken by the Babylonian army of Nebuchadnezzar when he attacked Egypt in 568/7 B.C., as prophesied by Jeremiah (43:8-13). In more modern times the Trans-Sinai railway was constructed over this relatively easy terrain, but, following the 1967 war, Israel destroyed the section from the town of el-'Arish to the Suez Canal. Nowadays, goods and materials passing between Israel and Egypt are transported along a coastal highway linking Israel with the Suez Canal Zone.

A considerable number of Jews fled to Egypt to escape the Babylonians. Some of these settled at Tahpanhes and others at Migdol, Noph (Memphis) (see [Map 2](#)) and in the country of Pathros (Jer. 44:1). The group led by Johanan the son of Kareah, which included Jeremiah and Baruch, ended up at Tahpanhes (43:5-7). Since Migdol and Tahpanhes lay very close to the Egyptian end of the coastal road, it is possible that they travelled this way to Egypt. On the other hand, with Bethlehem as their starting point (41:17), the more southerly route through Shur may have proved to be more convenient, and that would have brought them to the border of Egypt at a point about sixteen miles roughly south of Tahpanhes.

The road to Shur

The road to Shur is the most likely road used by Abraham when he visited Egypt (Gen. 12:10). Abraham was in the Negev, "the south", when he left for Egypt (v. 9), and afterwards he returned via the Negev to his original encampment near Bethel (13:1,3; 12:8). Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian maid, used it when fleeing from her mistress (16:7), presumably with the intention of returning to Egypt.

The towns of Dothan and Shechem lay well north of Hebron on this highway to Egypt. Consequently it could have been the road taken by the Ishmaelite merchants coming from Gilead who purchased Joseph and sold him into slavery in Egypt (37:25-28).

Alternatively, they may have cut across to the coastal route, going via Ramleh and Gaza, like the nineteenth-century caravans from Gilead to

Egypt that used to pass along the Wadi of Dothaim near Dothan.³

When Joseph's brothers came down to Egypt for corn they would have had to journey about 230 miles each way at a rough estimate (about 205 miles as the crow flies) if they travelled between Hebron and Avaris, in the east Delta, the most likely site for Joseph's home. Jacob, at the invitation of Joseph, travelled this road into Egypt with all his family, going via Beersheba (46:1-3). After being embalmed, the body of Jacob must have returned this way, since he was buried at Hebron/Mamre (50:13; 23:19).

When Assyria threatened Judah, the envoys that were sent from Jerusalem to obtain Egyptian help would have travelled 'the road to Shur'. The prophet Isaiah gives a very poetic picture of the area through which they would travel: "An oracle concerning the animals of the Negev: Through a land of hardship and distress, of lions and lionesses, of adders and darting snakes, the envoys carry their riches on donkeys' backs, their treasures on the humps of camels, to that unprofitable nation, to Egypt, whose help is utterly useless" (30:6,7, NIV).

Perhaps Mary and Joseph with the young child Jesus passed this way when fleeing into Egypt and later returning. It is unlikely that they had stayed at Bethlehem for the two years since the birth of Jesus, so we do not know which town they fled from. If they had gone to Hebron in the meantime, this would have been the route to use, but if Nazareth, either route would have proved suitable. One tradition is that they stayed at Memphis while in Egypt.⁴ Another is that they stayed at On (Heliopolis), where in those days there was a large Jewish colony and a temple founded by Onias.⁵ If they did travel by the coastal route, they would have crossed over into Egypt proper at El Qantara, where there was an ancient crossing of the former eastern branch of the Nile, the name El Qantara meaning 'the bridge'.

[\(To be continued\)](#)

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2. Shoshenq was of the twenty-second dynasty, and his capital was in the delta region at Zoan (Tanis).
 3. p. 466, *The Land and the Book*, W. M. Thomson, Nelson, 1864.
 4. p. 153, *Life and Words of Christ*, Geike, Vol. 1, Hodder and Stoughton, 1883.
 5. p. 29, *The Life of Christ*, F. W. Farrar, Cassell, 1891 edition.