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13-14
17-18.

THE ISLAMO-BAHA'I INTERPRETATION OF
DEUTERONOMY 33:2.

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Deuteronomy chapter 33 records words attributed to Moses when he blessed the "sons of Israel" (12 tribes) shortly before his death. Non-Deuteronomic sayings about the tribes (11th-8th cent. B.C.?) are framed by an archaic poem (=33:2-5+26-29) or psalm of praise celebrating God as King of Israel who gives victory to his people and destroys their enemies through his terrible epiphany (cf. also Judges 5:4, Ps. 68:7, Habb. 3:3f). It is the opening lines of the archaic and obscure poem, Deut 33:2, which have, as we shall see, provided an important prophetic proof text for both Muslims and Bahā'īs.¹

The difficult Hebrew text (MT) of Deut 33:2 and the RSV English translation are as follows:-²

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה סִינַי בָּא וְזָרַח סִינַי לְמוֹת הַנּוֹפִיעַ
 סִיֵּהר פָּרָן וְאַהֲרָה סִיֵּהר פָּרָן וְאַהֲרָה סִיֵּהר פָּרָן

"He[Moses] said, "The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us, he shone forth from Mount Paran, he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand."

A comparison of the RSV translation with other translations underlines the obscurity of the text³ which is generally taken to indicate God's emergence in theophanic splendour from the Egyptian border along the southern

1 . On Deut 33:2f refer for example, I.L. Seeligmann, A Psalm from Pre-Regal Times in Vetus Testamentum (VT) XIV(1964), pp.75-92 + Bib.p.75.fn.1.

2 . An attempted 'literal translation' of the MT might read, "The Lord came from Sinai and dawned forth from Seir upon them. He shone forth from Mount Paran, he came from the myriads of holiness[or holy ones]; from his right hand a fiery law[?] for them." (cf. Authorised[King James] Version).

3 . Without attempting to indicate the rationale behind them the following are three other English translations of Deut 33:2;

"The Lord came from Sinai and shone forth from Seir. He showed himself from Mount Paran, and with him were myriads of holy ones streaming along at his right hand." (New English Bible).

"Yahweh came from Sinai. For them, after Seir, he rose on the horizon, after Mount Paran he shone forth. For them, he came after the mustering at Kadesh [read not וְקָדֵשׁ but וְקָדֵשׁ] from his zenith as far as the foothills." (Jerusalem Bible).

"The Lord came from Sinai and rose up from Seir to His people [read not לְסִינַי but לְעַמּוֹ]. He shone forth from Mount Paran and has arrived from the desert of Qadesh [read $\text{וְסִיֵּהר פָּרָן קָדֵשׁ}$]. At his right hand— a fiery stream." (Seeligmann, VT XIV.p.76).

part of Israel. Deut 33:2 is not understood in a prophetic sense by modern Biblical scholars. It is usually thought to celebrate God's role in guiding his chosen people from Mount Sinai towards the promised land in the days of Moses.

Before setting down and commenting on some of the Muslim and Bahā'ī interpretations of Deut 33:2 it will be convenient to note the general scholarly opinion on the location of the three (or possibly four) geographical scenes of God's epiphany.

1. Sinai

Mount Sinai has traditionally been identified with Jebel Mūsā in southern Sinai—a number of modern scholars however, have rejected this interpretation though this need not concern us here.¹ In the Old Testament Mt. Sinai which is also named Mt. Horeb (in 'E' and 'D'; 'J' and 'P' using Sinai) is the scene of the revelation of God to Israel and the place where Moses conversed with him.

2. Seir

Mount Seir is, according to A.D.H. Mayes, usually taken (by modern Biblical scholars) to refer to "the mountainous region east of the Arabah"². (i.e. east of the depression through which the Jordan flows around the Dead Sea and down to the Gulf of Aqabah) though a location west of the Arabah and south of Beersheba has also been argued.³

3. Paran

Considerable uncertainty attaches itself to the location of the region or "wilderness of Paran" and it is generally admitted that the location of Mt. Paran is unknown. A close analysis of the Biblical references to Paran (esp. Gen 14:16, 21:21; Deut 1:22f, Num 10:11f, 13:3f, 26, I Sam 25:1, I Kings 11:18) however, clearly indicates that the "wilderness of Paran" lies south of Palestine or more precisely, " in the vicinity of its (Canaan's) S. border, and W of Edom, and N of the wilderness of Sinai."⁴ Paran has been defined as "the Biblical appellation for the main desert in the eastern Sinai peninsula."⁵ M. Noth in his The History of Israel² has expressed the opinion that Mt. Paran is "almost certainly identical with the modern jebel farān on the western side of the wadi el-'araba."⁶ though others in commenting on Deut 33:2 (and Habb 3:3) have thought Mt. Paran to be synonymous with Mt. Sinai. The Septuagint (LXX) at Num 33:36, it is of interest to note, identifies the wilderness of Kadesh with the wilderness of Paran.

1. Refer for example, J.P. Hyatt, Exodus (New Century Bible), London 1971, p. 203ff.

2. Mayes, Deuteronomy (New Century Bible Commentary), London 1981, p. 115.

3. Refer, J.R. Bartlett, The Land of Seir and the Brotherhood of Edom, in Journal of Theological Studies 20(1969), pp. 1-20.

4. So J.L. Mihelic in art. Paran in IDB. Vol. III, p. 657. This writer on the basis of the reference to "El Paran" (אֵל פָּרָן) in Gen 14:5-7 also states that "El Paran must be located in the neighborhood of Seir and Kadesh, " on the border of the wilderness". (ibid).

5. In art. Paran in Encyclopedia Judaica Vol. 13, col. 88.

6. Refer M. Noth, The History of Israel² (London 1960), p. 132.

4(?). Kadesh

As indicated above the words translated "he came from the ten thousands of holy ones" (so RSV. Heb.= וַיָּבֹאוּ אִתּוֹ עֲשָׂרִים אַלְפֵי קֳדָשִׁים w^e'atah mērib^ebōt qōdeš) have been read (repointed: וְקָדֵשׁ >

וְקָדֵשׁ = Kadesh) by some scholars so as to indicate a fourth scene of God's epiphany, namely Kadesh. The Septuagint has "with myriads of Kadesh" and some scholars have read מִמֵּרִיבַת קָדֵשׁ mim^eribat-qadeš or "from Meribath-Kadesh (cf. Num 27:14, 20:13, 24, etc).

In favour of a reading indicative of a fourth scene of God's epiphany is the unexpected reference to God's coming "from" (or "with"?) myriads of "holy ones" after clear reference to three other locations—one might, in other words, expect a fourth location to be mentioned. Whatever the correct translation or reading of this difficult clause is—certainty seems impossible—it may be noted that Kadesh (= Kadesh Barnea) is best located around the oasis ^cAin Qadis 50 miles south of Beersheba. ¹.

The Muslim interpretation of Deut 33:2

From the early centuries of the rise of Islām Muslim apologists found reference to the mission of the prophet Muhammad in Deut 33:2. This, in particular, inasmuch as there is reference to Mt. Paran which was early believed to be a mountain around or not far distant from Mecca and in the light of Ishmael's association with Paran (Gen 21:21). By the 9th-10th centuries Deut. 33:2 was held to foreshadow the successive divine missions of Moses and Jesus as well as that of the prophet Muhammad. It was not that God himself appeared from Sinai, Seir and Paran but that three prophets rose up or were commissioned in the regions of Mt. Sinai, Mt. Seir and Mt. Paran. The reference to Sinai indicates the prophethood of Moses who received the Law on that mountain. Seir, relocated north in Galilee and identified with a mountain near Nazareth (now Nebi Sa'in just north of Nazareth Jesus' home village) alludes to the mission of Jesus who was thought to have received the Gospel (Injīl) on this relocated mountain. Mt. Paran, also relocated south some 500

1. This clause is, in fact, extremely puzzling. The verb וַיָּבֹאוּ is Aramaic (being sometimes used in Hebrew poetry, cf. Deut 33:21, Isa 21:12, etc) and has been read as (not w^e'atah = "and he came" but) "and with him" (w^e'ittō) in the NEB (see below fn. p. 1.) the clause being understood to signify God's theophany with his attendant divine beings (cf. Ps. 68). The word(s) translated "flaming fire" by RSV (אֵשׁ לַפִּיטוֹת) have been commented on by Mayes as follows: " one word in the Hebrew 'ēsdāt, which is however, pointed by the Massoretes as two words, understood by the Vulg (igneallex) and following that, by the A[uthorised] V[ersion], as 'fiery law'. The second of the two words, dāt, is, however, a late Persian loan word in Hebrew, and, unlikely in this context; and the fact that the consonants of the alleged two words are written together as a single word suggests that the Massoretic treatment of the word is not correct. RSV seems to understand 'eš lappidot, 'fire of flames', but this involves considerable interference in the text, and does not really result in anything credible." Mayes, op. cit. p. 399.

miles or more in the Mecca region, alludes to the mission of the Arabian prophet.

Among the earliest extant Muslim interpretations of Deut 33:2 is that of ^cAlī b. Rabban al-Tabari (fl. mid 9th cent. A.D.). In his Kitāb al-Dīn wa'l-Daula ('The Book of Religion and Empire') he quotes Deut 33:2-3 in what appears to be an Arabic translation of the Peshitta Syriac¹ and comments: "Paran is the land which Ishmael—peace be with him—inhabited; for this reason God had previously mentioned it in the Torah, saying "And he [Ishmael] learned archery in the wilderness of Paran" [Gen 21:20-21]. All the people knew that Ishmael dwelt in Maccah, and his children and successors who are in it and around it know the abode of their grandfather, and do not ignore his land and his country;— and "the Lord" rose up from Paran! If this is not as we have mentioned, let them show us "a lord" who appeared from Mount Paran; and they will never be able to do so. The name "lord" refers here to the Prophet—may God bless and save him; it is a word applied by Arabs and non-Arabs to the Most High God, or to men, his servants, as if you would say "the lord of the house!" and as the Syrians call the man whom they wish to exalt: Mārī = "my lord," "my master," mār meaning in Syriac "lord"." **2.**

This early Muslim exegesis of Deut 33:2 differs from the standard later Muslim interpretations in identifying the "Lord" (Heb. יהוה, the Tetragrammaton ["Yahweh"], Syriac ܝܫܘܐ) with the prophet Muhammad—

1. The Peshitta is the authorized Bible of the Syrian Church dating from the 4th-5th cent. A.D.—traditionally ascribed to Rabbula Bishop of Edessa (d.c. 435 A.D.).

A. Mingana's translation of the text quoted by al-Tabari is, "The Lord came from [Mount] Sinai, and rose up from Seir, and appeared from Mount Paran, with tens of thousands of saints at His right hand (ܕܥܫܪ ܡܝܢ ܩܕܝܫܝܢ) He gave them (power), and made them to be loved by nations, and called blessings on all his saints." (Deut 33:2-3). Refer, Mingana, The Book of Religion and Empire, p. 86-7

2. ET. Mingana, The Book of Religion and Empire, p. 87. al-Tabari basically argues that Paran, the dwelling place of Ishmael (see Gen 21:21), is to be associated with Mecca—since it is well known that Ishmael dwelt at Mecca and his descendants are well aware of this fact. Thus, that "the Lord" appeared from Paran must signify the rise of the prophet Muhammad in Mecca since no other prophet rose up from this place.

—the argument that "lord" is used for men (as well as God) and may thus be applied to the prophet Muhammad is incorrect inasmuch as the Hebrew and Syriac texts use the Tetragrammaton which designates God alone.¹ Sinai and Seir are not related to Moses and Jesus and the association of Paran with Mecca is argued on the basis of scripture (Gen 21:21) and tradition rather than this identification being assumed to be an established geographical fact.²

The more developed kind of interpretation of Deut 33:2 (outlined above) is found a generation or so after al-Tabari. Ibn Qutaybah (c.828-889.A.D.) whose interpretation has been cited by a number of later Muslim writers including Ibn Taymīyah (d.1328.A.D., refer his al-Jawāb al-Sahīh iii.282.) expressed the following opinion: "To one who reflects there is no obscurity of any kind [in Deut 33:2]. The coming of God from Mount Sinai is his revealing the Torah to Moses from Mount Sinai, as we both (Muslims and Christians) agree. Likewise His shining from Sa'ir must be His revealing the Gospel to the Messiah, for the Messiah was from Sa'ir the country of Abraham, in a village called Nāsīrah, after which his followers are called Nasārā. And as his shining from Sa'ir must refer to the Messiah, so his displaying Himself from the mountains of Faran must mean his revealing the Qur'an to Muhammad. There is no dispute between Muslims and the people of the Book about Faran being Meccah."³ The comments of al-Bīrūnī (d.1050.A.D.) on Deut 33:2 as recorded in his al-Athār al-Bāqiya an al-Qurūn al-Khāliya are similar: "Does not the following passage.. of which this is the translation (Deut. xxxiii.2), bear testimony for Muhammad: "The Lord came from Mount Sinai, and rose up unto us from Seir, and he shined forth from Mount Paran, accompanied by ten thousand of saints at his right hand?" The terms of this passage are hints for the establishing of the proof, that the (anthropomorphic) descriptions, which are inherent in them

1. This is pointed out by D.S. Margoliouth in On 'The Book of Religion and Empire'.. in PBA 16 (1930), p.175. Later Muslim writers, as we shall see, quoted different versions of Deut 33:2 and associated the mention of the coming of "the Lord" with the divine revelation —or in various ways got round, sometimes by interpolating or rewriting the text, the problem of the Lord's appearance from Paran, etc.
2. In the article referred to in the above fn. Margoliouth draws attention to the fact that Diyārbakrī (d.1558.A.D.) in his 'Tarikh al-Khamīs..' records a tradition that ^cAbdallāh b. Salām (a contemporary of the Prophet) attempted to relate the Paran/Faran of Deut 33:2 among the mountains of Mecca and that the geographer al-Hamdānī (d.945.A.D.) in his al-Iklīl (Ed. Muller, 170, 10) mentions Faran as a name for the Haram which is found in the Torah where the mountains of Faran are mentioned.
3. Cited Margoliouth, ibid, p.175-6.

cannot be referred to the essence of the Creator, nor to his qualities, he being high above such things. His coming from Mount Sinai means his secret conversation with Moses there; his rising up from Seir means the appearance of the Messiah, and his shining forth from Mount Paran, where Ishmael grew up and married, means the coming of Muhammad from thence as the last of all the founders of religions, accompanied by legions of saints, who were sent down from heaven to help, being marked with certain badges. He who refuses to accept this interpretation, for which all evidence has borne testimony, is required to prove what kinds of mistakes there are in it." Thus for al-Birūnī, unlike al-Tabari, the reference to the coming of the Lord in Deut 33:2 implies an unacceptable anthropomorphism and must refer to the advent of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad with whom God (indirectly) had dealings. The "ten thousands of saints" are heavenly beings who helped the prophet Muhammad (refer Deut 33:2b).

The abovementioned Ibn Taymiyah has not only recorded the comments of Ibn Qutaybah on Deut 33:2 but made some interesting observations of his own. They have been summed up as follows: "...near Bethlehem, where the Messiah was born, is a village called Sa'ir to this day, having mountains also called by that name. The mountain Faran, of which Moses speaks, is Mount Hirā, where Muhammad's revelation commenced; there is no mountain of those round Meccah, said to be ten thousand in number, higher than mount Hirā; and the place is called Faran to this day, and the desert which is between Meccah and Mount Sinai is called the Desert of Faran." ^{2. It is clear that by the} time of Ibn Taymiyah (13-14th centuries A.D.) Mt. Paran/Farān had been explicitly identified with Mt. Hirā a hill outside Mecca where Muhammad is traditionally said to have retreated for meditation and where he is believed to have encountered the angel Gabriel at the beginning of his mission. ^{3.}

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1. ET. from the Ed of E. Sachau, The Chronology of Ancient Nations, London 1879., p.23.
 2. D.S. Margoliouth, art. cit. p.176. This same writer also notes Yāqūt ibn ʿAbd-
-allāh al-Hamawī's (1179-1229 A.D.) comments on Deut 33:2. Sa'ir (Seir) is a village in Nazareth between Tiberius and ʿAkka (Acre). Faran is a name of Mecca -- Ibn Makulā (11th cent. A.D., whom Yāqūt quotes) states that the mountains of Farān are the mountains of Hijāz -- though the view that the mountains of Farān are situated in Pālestine or south of Kirkuk is also noted.
 3. It is not however, the case that all subsequent Muslim writers identify Mt. Paran/Farān with Mt. Hirā.

Having set down something of the medieval Muslim interpretation of Deut 33:2 and before commenting on the Bahā'ī interpretation of this verse a few much later Shī'ī interpretations may be outlined and commented upon— learned Shī'ī Muslim writers were well aware of the whole range of Biblical texts applied to the prophet Muhammad and the rise of Islam and usually quote Deut 33:2 in this connection.

In the beginning of the 17th cent. A.D. the Catholic missionary Father Jerome Xavier wrote an apologetic work entitled The Truth Revealing Mirror ('A'ina-i Haqq Nama, written in Persian) which was sent to Shah ^cAbbas I (1587-1629) and became well known in the court circles of the time. In a reply to this work entitled 'The Lordly rays in refutation of the Christian error' (al-Lawāmi^c al-Rabāniyya fī radd al-Shubah al-Nasrāniyya, written in 1621. A.D.) by the Persian Shi'ī writer Ahmad ibn Zayn al-^cAbidīn various prophecies, including Deut 33:2, are applied to the prophet Muhammad. The text and comments of the latter writer on Deut 33:2 are as follows:-

"A light came from Mount Sinai, and it shone upon us from Mount Seir, and it was revealed to us from Mount Paran (text quoted in Arabic)." ..it is well known that the passage "A light came from Mount Sinai," alludes to the revelation received by Moses on Mount Sinai: and, that the passage, "It shone upon us from Mount Seir," alludes to the revelation received by the Messiah from Mount Seir; for by Seir is meant Galilee, in a village of which, called Nazareth, the Messiah dwelt, whence his followers have been called Nazarenes. As to the passage, "It was revealed to us from Mount Paran," the meaning is, the revelation of Mohammad received on Mount Paran, which is a mountain in the neighbourhood of Mecca, between which and Mecca there is a journey of two days. It is also well known, that Abraham made Mecca the residence of Ishmael, and that Mohammad is descended from him." ¹.

It will be evident that this interpretation follows the standard earlier interpretations of Deut 33:2 though it is of interest to note that the exegetical complications that result from the occurrence of the Tetragrammaton ("the Lord came...") at the beginning of the verse are solved by the substitution of "a light" (al-nūr) which shone upon Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

¹. Text and translation in S. Lee (Ed) Controversial Tracts on Christianity and Mohammedanism.. (Cambridge 1824), pp. xlv-xlvi.

During part of the years 1811-12 the English missionary Henry Martyn (1781-1812) spent some time in Shirāz(Irān) working on his Persian translation of the New Testament and debating with the local Shī'ī and Sūfī notables and ḥulamā. He wrote several tracts in support of his fervently held Christian views which called forth rejoinders from a number of Shī'ī Muslim writers including one written in 1813 by Muḥammad Ridā ibn Muḥammad Amīn Hamadānī. A large proportion of Hamadānī's reply to Martyn is taken up with the application of Biblical prophecies to Muḥammad and Islām. Once again the standard Muslim interpretation of Deut 33:2 is set forth:

"..in the last section of the Law (Deut xxxiii.2.) there is a passage to this effect: "God was revealed from Sinai; he shone forth from Seir; and imparted his bounty from Paran." Now there can be no doubt that this relates to the missions of Moses, Jesus and Mohammad, respectively. For the place in which Moses saw the glory was mount Sinai: that of the mission of Jesus was Seir; that of Mohammad the desert of Paran: for all the Jewish commentators agree, that Paran (whether occurring in the Law or elsewhere) and Mecca are the same place.."

The "third Shaykh" of the Shaykhis Hajji Mīrzā Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (1816-1871) also took it upon himself to reply to one of the writings of a Christian missionary, Carl Gottlieb Pfander (1803-1865). His Kitāb-i Nusrat al-Dīn (written in Persian in 1266.A.H./1849-50) appears to be a reply to Pfander's Tarīq al-Hayāt (printed in Persian at Agra in 1847) which is largely concerned with the exposition of the evangelical understanding of sin and salvation.² At several points in Karim Khan's reply

1. ET. Lee in Controversial Tracts.. pp.278-9. Hamadānī also refers to Gen 23:11f identifying Lahai Roi (see Gen 24:62+16:7,14) with the well of Zamzam in Mecca-- the residence of Ishmael. It is not of course true that all Jewish commentators agree that Paran and Mecca are one and the same place or region. Sa'd Ibn Mansūr Ibn Kammūna (c.1215-c.1285.A.D.) a member of the Jewish community of Baghdad in his Examination of the Enquiries into the Three Faiths (Tanqīh al-abḥāt li-l-milal al-talāt) in criticising the Muslim interpretation of Deut 33:2 notes the view that Mt. Paran is in the Hejaz (attributed to Ibn al-Kūfī the author of Manāzil Makka and to [Abū Ibrāhīm Ishāq al-Fārābī. d.961.A.D.?] the author of Diwan al-Adab) but regards this tradition as weak. (refer, Ibn Kammūna's Examination of Three Faiths tr. Moshe Perlmann, London, 1971. p.138ff.

2. In his Kitāb-i Nusrat al-Dīn (2nd Ed. printed Kirman 1329) Karīm Khān (see p.2ff) does not clearly identify the "Padre" (a common designation for Christian missionaries) against whom he writes or the title of his book.

Biblical prophecies are applied to Muhammad and the rise of Islām (pp.293-328 are wholly devoted to this subject), including Deut 33:2. At one point Karim Khan writes:

"Another testimony to [the truth of] our Prophet [Muhammad] in this Book [Deuteronomy] is chapter 33 verse 2 where it says: "The light of God [نور خداوند] came from Sinai and shined forth [اشراق] upon us from Seir, and was manifest from Mount Paran, and with Him were thousands of saints [هزاران یاکان], from his right hand a fiery law [از دست راست او سنتی بود از آتش]." It is clear that the light of God [نور خداوند] that was manifest from Sinai was the light of the prophethood of Moses [نور نبوت موسی], its manifestation from Seir was the light of the prophethood of Jesus which beamed forth unto him from Mt. Seir; and its manifestation from Mt. Paran is the light of the prophethood of the Prophet of the last times [Muhammad], which shone forth upon that eminent one from Mt. Paran which is a mountain in Mecca.."

Having set down the classic Muslim interpretation of Deut 33:2 and like (the abovementioned) Ahmad ibn Zayn al-^cAbidīn substituted the "light of God" for God himself Karīm Khān adds that the Prophet Muhammad like Ishmael appeared from the "valley of Paran" (وادی فاران)—referring to Gen 21:21. This confirms the interpretation, which is partly rooted in the conviction that the Arabs are the descendants of Ishmael who dwelt in the "valley of Paran" and the "brethren" of Deut 18:18.² In Karīm Khān's extended discussion of the Biblical texts that apply to Muhammad and Islām (p.293ff) the same interpretation of Deut 33:2 is repeated. At this point however he argues — being aware that the opening line of Deut 33:2 reads "God came.." — that the meaning is not that "God came" but that His amr ("cause/command") and hukm ("decree/law") shone forth from Sinai at the time of the commissioning of Moses; that His amr and His nūr (light) were manifest from Mt. Seir (upon Jesus) as upon the Prophet Muhammad from Mt. Paran.³

1. Kitāb-i Nusrat al-Dīn, p.88.

2. Refer, ibid., +p.295.

3. Refer, ibid., pp.299-300. The text of Deut 33:2 quoted here by Karim Khan differs from that translated above (from p.88) — and as it (accurately) begins "God came" he finds it necessary to get round this problem:

" آمد خدا از سینا و اشراق کرد برای ما از سامعیر و ظاهر شد از کوه فاران
و با او بودند ألوف اظهار در راست او سنتی بود از آتش "

Such in outline are some representative examples of the Muslim interpretation of Deut 33:2; interpretations which are still boldly set forth today by Muslim apologists and which have been criticised by countless Jewish and Christian polemicists.¹

The Bahā'ī interpretation of Deut 33:2

Commenting on the Muslim interpretation of Deut 33:2 the 13th cent. (A.D.) Jewish writer Ibn Kammūna has written,

"If the opinion was accurate that the passages "came from Sinai," "rose from Seir", and "shined forth from Mount Paran" alluded to the prophethood of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, respectively, then the following passage "and came from the myriads holy" would be an allusion to a fourth religion-- a conclusion no Muslim has reached."²

This interesting observation anticipates a "conclusion" which has in fact been reached by Bahā'īs; namely that the last clause of Deut 33:2 alludes to or predicts the advent of a fourth divine manifestation in the person of Mirza Husayn ^CAlī Bahā'u'llāh who founded the Bahā'ī religion.

By the late 1880's such an interpretation of Deut 33:2b had been reached by Bahā'ī apologists who drew on and extended the Muslim interpretation of this verse in the course of their debates with Jews, Christian and Muslims whom they wished to convert to the Bahā'ī movement.

Though I am not aware of any quotation of Deut 33:2 by Bahā'u'llāh himself both ^CAbdu'l-Bahā and Shoghi Effendi have made reference to it and many oriental and occidental Bahā'ī writers have commented upon it usually setting down the Muslim interpretation and applying the last clause to Bahā'u'llāh. The Bahā'ī interpretation of Deut 33:2 is rooted in the Muslim interpretation being sometimes dependent on a 'rewriting' of the last clause as it is translated in the various Persian and Arabic Bibles or recorded in the writings of Muslim apologists.

1. A good example of the modern type Muslim interpretation of Deut 33:2 can be found in Maulana Abdul Haque's Muhammad in World Scripture² (Vol. II (Lahore 1975), pp. 510-515. In this lengthy work an uninformed and selective use is made of the findings of modern Biblical scholarship and of the Bible itself in the comments on Deut 33:2 though the treatment is of considerable interest and ingenuity.
2. Ibn Kammūna, Tanqih al abhāt. tr. Perlmann (see fn. below), p. 142.

Among the earliest expressions of the Bahā'ī interpretation of Deut 33:2 is that of Mīrzā Abū al-Fadl Gulpaygānī (1844-1914) in his Sharh-i Ayat-i Muwarrikha ('Commentary on the Chronological Proof Texts', written in Persian in Hamadan in 1888).¹ Gulpaygānī, who originally conceived many of the distinctively Baha'i interpretations of Biblical texts possibly including that of Deut 33:2, quotes Deut 33:2 in Persian² and sets down in a highly ornate style reminiscent of that of Bahā'u'llāh's Kitāb-i Igān (written in Baghdad in 1863) the Muslim interpretation of this verse. The advent of God from Sinai signifies the coming of divine guidance through "the illumined Mosaic Tree". From Seir the "breezes of the Holy Spirit of Jesus" (نغمات روح القدس عيسوی) renewed the world which was also illumined "by the lights of the Muhammadan countenance" from Mt. Paran. Then, in connection with the fourth eschatologically understood manifestation of God Gulpaygānī paraphrases the last clause of Deut 33:2 in such a way as to teach that Bahā'u'llāh came with "myriads of holy ones" (هزار هزار مقدس) and with a fiery law (شریعت آتشین) — perhaps having in mind Bahā'u'llāh's Kitāb al-Aqdas, written in c.1873) so that the world may attain universal salvation and beatitude. Having paraphrased and commented in this manner on Deut 33:2 Qur'an 14:5 is quoted as if this verse confirms the prophetic and eschatological interpretation of the words of Moses (Deut 33:2) in question. The 14th verse of the New Testament Epistle of Jude is also quoted by Gulpaygani in confirmation of the eschatological sense of the last clause of Deut 33:2.³ Finally, he states that the Islāmic ulamā find but three manifestations mentioned in Deut 33:2 (Moses, Jesus and Muhammad) adding that for the "people of insight" there is clear reference to a fourth, the "glad-tidings of the Bahā'ī /glorious manifestation" (Bahā'u'llāh).

1. Refer Sharh Ayāt-i Muwarrikha, (Shanghai 1925), pp.27-29.

2. The text of Deut 33:2 quoted by Gulpaygani is as follows:-

خداوند بر آمد از سینا و تجلی فرمود از سبیر و درخشید از فاران و ظهور خواهد فرمود
با هزار هزار مقدس از پیشانی آتشین با ایشان خواهد رسید.

3. This clearly from the text of Jude v.14 itself which purports to be a prophecy of Enoch the "seventh from Adam" : "It was with them in mind that Enoch..made his prophecy when he said, "I tell you, the Lord will come with his saints in their tens of thousands, to pronounce judgement on all mankind.." (JB). The words "the Lord will come [lit. hath come] with his saints in their tens of thousands" are in fact a slightly revised quotation from I (Ethiopic) Enoch (1:9 around 1st century A.D.) which itself draws on Deut 33:2b. See further below, p.13.

Elsewhere in Gulpaygānī's writings similar interpretations of Deut 33:2 are to be found. Of particular interest is his discussion of this verse in a letter in reply to questions about Biblical prophecies which apply to Muhammad addressed to Mīrzā Husayn Effendi Ruhī (1878-1960)¹. The text of Deut 33:2 is quoted in the Van Dyke Arabic translation², the Muslim interpretation outlined and the opinion expressed that there is prophetic allusion to four "manifestations" (zuhurāt). The problem posed by the fact that the verbs in Deut 33:2 express a past tense or that the alleged four epiphanies are represented as events of the past is next taken up. That Deut 33:2 concerns God's appearance to Israel at the time of Moses or in the past was underlined by Jewish critics of the Muslim interpretation of Deut 33:2. Moses Maimonides (1135 - 1204) in his "Letter to Yemen" (addressed to Jacob b. Nathaniel of Yemen in 1172.A.D.) rejected Mt. Paran as an allusion to the appearance of the prophet Muhammad on the grounds that the verb "he shined" (أَشْرَقَ) indicates a past event.³ Ibn Kammūna makes the same objection to the Muslim interpretation of Deut 33:2 when he writes, "...the words came, rose, shined forth all relate to a matter of the past, not to something expected in the future."⁴ Gulpaygānī thus takes up an age old objection to the Muslim type interpretation of Deut 33:2; an objection which was doubtless raised by Jews and Christians in their debates with Bahā'īs about the interpretation of this verse. His solution to the problem is ingenious.

It is of little consequence that أَشْرَقَ ("shone forth"), تَلَاوَا ("beamed forth") and أَتَى ("came": so the Van Dyke Arabic Bible translation) occur in the past tense since prophetic "glad-tidings" of the Holy Books frequently occur in the past tense--though with futuristic import. In proof of this assertion Gulpaygānī quotes Qur'an 89:22 : وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا
 "And thy Lord cometh [lit. out of context, came] and the angels rank upon rank". Here the verb جَاءَ (= "to come") occurs in the past tense despite the fact that

1. Written in Arabic in Cairo on 9th June 1900 and published in Mukhtarāt min Mu'allafāt Abī al-Fada'il (Brussels 132.BE./1970), pp.251-72.
2. The Van Dyke trans. of Deut 33:2 reads: .. جَاءَ الرَّبُّ مِنْ سَيْمَاً وَأَشْرَقَ لَمْ يَنْ يَسْعِيرُ وَ تَلَاوَا
بِئْسَ سَبِيلَ فَاذَانَ وَ أَتَى مِنْ رَبِّكَ الْقُدْسِ وَمَنْ يَمِينِهِ نَارٌ شَرِيعَةٍ لَمْ.
 This appears to be the version quoted by Gulpaygānī though at the end of the verse he has " نَارُ شَرِيعَةٍ " not " قَبَسِ الشَّرِيعَةِ ".
3. Refer, J. Sarachek, The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature (New York 1932), p.138.
4. Ibn Kammūna, Tanqih al-abhāt.. tr. Perlmann, p.142.

the verse has obvious eschatological import.¹ Jude 14, it is also observed, expresses the future coming of the Lord despite the use of the past tense. Gulpaygānī quotes the Van Dyke translation of Jude 14 in which the coming of the Lord with myriads of saints is represented as a prophecy of Enoch and which is, in both the original Greek and the Arabic translation expressed in the 'past tense' (i.e. aorist "prophetic preterite" and 'past perfect' or perfect+ particle qad).² His argument is reminiscent of that of the 2nd century Christian apologist Justyn Martyr who, in his Dialogue with the Jew Tryphon (114.1) wrote:

"Sometimes the Holy Spirit caused what was to be a type of the future to be performed openly, and sometimes he also uttered sayings about things which were to happen in the future as though they were then taking place, or had already taken place. And unless the readers know this method they will not be able to follow the words of the prophets as they ought."³

The renowned Bahā'ī poet Mīrzā Na^cīm Isfahānī (d. 1334 AH./1915-16 AD) was, like Gulpaygānī, particularly learned in the interpretation of Biblical texts. In his Istidlāliyya ("Testimonia") he proposes an interpretation of Deut 33:2 which, in part, differs from that of Gulpaygānī.⁴ He begins his discussion of this text by stating that it announces the "glad-tidings" of four manifestations and quotes the following partly rewritten Persian version:

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1. cf. also Qur'ān 89:21 (كَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا , "When the earth is pounded to dust") the verse preceeding that quoted by Gulpaygānī where the conjunction idhā implies a future sense despite the occurrence of the verb دَكَّتِ in the following verse in the perfect. cf. Bahā'u'llāh's criticisms of those Qur'ānic commentators who argued that idhā followed by a verb in the perfect/'past tense' must have futuristic import and who thereby failed to apply Qur'an 50:20 to the mission of the prophet Muhammad (refer, Kitāb -i Iqān, ET. Shoghi Effendi [London 1961], pp. 74-5). The Bāb and Bābī writers in particular had something of a disdain for grammatical or literal-istic scriptural exegesis in favour of an allegorical or "spiritual" hermeneutic— not that the above argument of Gulpaygānī contravenes the well-known rules of Qur'ānic Arabic (surrounding the use of the 'prophetic past tense').
2. The Van Dyke translation of Jude 14 reads: « وَتَنْبَأُ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ أَيْضًا أَخْشَرُ النَّاسِ »
« مِنْ آدَمَ قَائِلًا هُوَذَا قَدْ جَاءَ الرَّبُّ فِي رِبَابِهِ قَدِيمِيهِ »
 In this translation the Arabic قَدْ جَاءَ accurately translates the original Greek ἤλθεν ēlthen (lit. 'has come' aorist) a "prophetic preterite" which is "intended to underline the certainty of God's action by dramatically expressing it as already accomplished" (Refer, J.N.D. Kelly, A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude (London 1969), p. 276.
3. Justyn Martyr cited R.M. Grant, A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible (New York 1963), p. 40.
4. I have used a photocopy of this Istidlāliyya (Ed. ? Mirza ^c Abdallāh Mutlaq np.nd. written c. 1907 ?) provided by the Bahā'ī World Centre, Haifa.

”.. خداوند برآمد از سینا و تجلی کرد از ساعیر و درحشید از فاران
و ورود نمود با هزاران هزار مقدس از تلهای اراض مقدسه ..”

"God came from Sinai and shone forth from Seir. He beamed forth from Paran and came with thousands of saints from the hills of the Holy Land."

This peculiar Persian version of Deut 33:2 is based on an initially literal then speculative reading or repointing of the Arabic version known to Mīrzā Na'īm (close to the Van Dyke version).¹ Where the Arabic version has " من ربوات القدس " (' min ribwāt al-quds ?= "from myriads/ten thousands of saints"), ربوات (ribwāt = the plural of ربوة ribwa) is read as رَبْوَات (rubwāt) and understood to be the plural of رَبِي (ruban = a hill). A fourth manifestation is thus understood to have been predicted in Deut 33:2b, the manifestation of Bahā'u'llāh in the Holy Land or from the "holy hills".² While the reading "with ten thousands of saints" is not here rejected the Arabic translation of this phrase suggested the geographical location of the fourth Bahā'ī manifestation.³

Mirza Na'īm sums up his interpretation of Deut 33:2 by writing,

"Briefly, in this verse the manifestation of Moses in the Mount (Tūr = Mt. Sinai), Jesus in Seir, Muhammad in Paran and the Ancient Beauty (Jamāl-i Qidam = Bahā'u'llāh) in the Mount of the Fig and the Olive and Mt. Carmel were announced.."⁴

1. The Arabic version of Deut 33:2 quoted by Mirza Na'īm reads:

”.. جاء الرب من سيناء و اشراق من ساعير و تلا من جبل فاران و اتي من
ربوات القدس و عن يسين و نار شريعة لهم .”

2. Bahā'u'llāh in several of his writings of the late ^cAkkā period identifies the "hill of God" mentioned in the Old Testament (cf. Ps 24:3, 42:6, 68:15f, 2:6, 3:4, 15:1, 43:3, 99:9) with Mt. Carmel which he several times visited. Refer, Ma'ida-yi Asmānī, Vol. 4, p. 218, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf (ET. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette 1971), p. 145. Such an identification may have contributed to the abovementioned interpretation of the last clause of Deut 33:2.

3. In commenting on Deut 33:2 Mīrzā Na'īm (Istidlāliyya , p. 65) also quotes the following extract from a certain "Prayer of the Signs" (Du'a-yi Simāt) attributed to Imām ^cAlī which appears to be based on Deut 33:2 :

"And by Thy Glory (مجدد) which appeared on Mt. Sinai and through which you [God] conversed with your servant and your messenger Moses son of ^cImrān; and by your rising up in Seir and your manifestation on Mt. Paran; and by the myriads of holy ones (و بربوات المقدسين) and the hosts of the sanctified angels."

4. The reference here to the "Mount of the Fig and the Olive" is an allusion to

Before leaving the subject of the interpretation of Deut 33:2 Mirza Naim makes a few interesting remarks about Seir. He does not repeat the usual identification of Mt. Seir with a mountain in Galilee but argues that Seir is a region between Egypt and the Holy Land frequented by both Moses and Jesus. Christians who say that the Messiah did not journey to Seir are mistaken¹. Indeed, the advent of Jesus from Seir is predicted in several of the books of the (OT) prophets. If, Mīrzā Na'īm asks, the announcement of one from Seir does not refer to Jesus how can it be that Jesus said "Moses wrote concerning me.." (Jn 5:46).

The interpretation of the last clause of Deut 33:2 proposed by Mīrzā Na'īm was taken up and elaborated by the late ^cAbd al-Hamīd Ishraq Khavarī (1902 - 1972) in his massive Rahiq-i Makhtūm². He outlines the Bahā'ī conviction that four successive messengers of God are alluded to in Deut 33:2 (identifying the fourth with Bahā'u'llāh) and notes that the Persian versions of the Bible have "کردهای مقدسین" (kurūrhā-yi muqaddasin = " thousands of holy ones") for the Arabic "ربوات" "قدس". He then writes:

" In the estimation of this writer " ربوات قدس " in this place (Deut 33:2b) has the meaning sanctified hills and mounds (tappahā va tillhā-yi muqaddas) such that the intention is the Holy Land and the 'bridal chamber (jilwa-gāh) of the Ancient Beauty (Bahā'u'llah). 3.

Qur'an 95:1f (" By the Fig and the Olive and Mt. Sinai..") in which the reference to the "Fig" and the "Olive" are thought by some Qur'anic commentators to be allusions to two mountains in the Holy Land; and thus to Bahā'u'llāh's manifestation there. cf. al-Tibyān wa'l-Burhān, Vol. I (Beirut 1972), p.129ff and the letters of ^cAbdu'l-Bahā in Mā'ida-yi Asmānī Vol. 9. p. 8. and Vol. 2. p. 48.

1. In claiming that Jesus passed through Seir Mīrzā Na'īm may have in mind Jesus' journey to Egypt as an infant in order to escape the persecution of Herod (see Matt 2:13ff).
2. Ishraq Khavarī's Rahiq-i Makhtūm (2 Vols. Tihran 130-1 BE.) is a commentary on Shoghi Effendi's "Lawh-i Qarn" in which, as we shall see below, Deut 33:2b is quoted in reference to Bahā'u'llāh. His treatment of Deut 33:2 is set down in Vol. I. pp. 58-60.
3. Ishraq Khavarī, Rahiq-i Makhtūm, Vol. I. p. 58.

Ishraq Khavari continues to argue that such an understanding of the last clause of Deut 33:2 is supported by the geographical references in the first three parts of the verse. One expects, in other words, reference to a fourth manifestation from a fourth locality-- a line of reasoning that, as we have seen, has influenced some textual critics to read Kadesh (קָדֵשׁ) instead of (MT) "holy ones" (קָדְשִׁים). He denies that كردرهائى متين "thousands of holy ones" (=Per. Bible trans.) is a suitable translation of Deut 33:2b⁴ seemingly unconscious of any need of consult the Hebrew (a language he did not know), and holds on the basis of (the Arabic trans.) ربوات القدس understood as " sanctified hills" that this phrase signifies the Holy Land or, more explicitly, Mt. Carmel.⁴

Also adduced in support of a fourth scene of God's epiphany is the repeated occurrence of the preposition من (i.e. "...from Sinai..", "...from Seir..", "...from Mt. Paran.." + "...from _____" : so the Van Dyke Arabic trans. cited by Ishraq Khavari [من × 4] as well as the Hebrew [מן × 4]) which, at its fourth occurrence, allegedly necessitates a fourth (Bahā'ī) manifestation from the "sanctified hills" of the Holy Land.²

Apart from Abū al-Fadl Gulpaygānī, Mīrzā Na^cīm Isfahānī, and Ishraq Khavari a whole host of oriental and occidental Bahā'ī writers from the late 19th. cent. up till the present day have commented on Deut 33:2 for the most part repeating interpretations on the above lines. Jibrān Sāssī (d. 1903) an early Egyptian Christian convert to the Bahā'ī movement³ for

1. Ishraq Khavari also cites an Arabic dictionary to the effect that " ربوة " may bear the meaning "hill" (Per. تپه) or "mound" (Per. تل) since its initial consonant (ر) bears this sense when inflected with either of the three (Arabic) vowels. An Arabic lexical source has it that al-rubwa, al-rabwa and al-ribwa each signify " what rises up from the earth" (i.e. a mound or hill) Refer Rahīq-i Makhtūm Vol. I. p. 59.
2. In confirmation of his interpretation of Deut 33:2 Ishraq Khavari (ibid) notes that Jināb-i Ḥajjī Sadr al-Ṣudūr (d.c. 1907 a prominent Iranian Bahā'ī) in his Istidlaliyya understood ربوات القدس to signify " mounds of the Holy Land" (تل های ارضى مقدس)-- though this may in fact be a reference to the abovequoted Istidlaliyya by Mīrzā Na^cīm Isfahānī since (in the edition I have consulted) it was apparently edited by Mīrzā Abdallāh Mutlaq in a version completed by Sadr al-Ṣudūr.
3. I assume that the Jibrān Sāssī represented as the author of the Istidlaliyya published in Cairo (NSA. of the Bahā'īs of Egypt ?) around the 1940's (nd. ?) is an Arabic printing of Gabriel Sacy's Du Regne de Dieu et de l'Agneau connu sous le nom de Babysme: se trouve chez l'Auteur au Caire (Cairo, privately printed June 1902 : not seen).

example, in his Istidlāliyya quotes Deut 33:2 with the following interlinear comments: "The Lord drew nigh from Sinai (= Moses), and rose up unto them from Seir (= Jesus from a mountain which is in the promised land) and shone forth from Mt. Paran (= Muhammad from the mountain which is in the Arabian peninsular) and he came from the holy hills (?reading ربي القدس [!]: = in the day of God) and from his right hand a fiery law.." 1.

Hajji Mīrzā Mahdī Arjumand (d. 1710's?; a prominent Iranian Jewish convert to the Bahā'ī movement) in his recently republished Gulshan-i Haqā'iyiq (early 20th cent.) interprets Deut 33:2 in a manner very similar to Gulpaygānī (in his Sharḥ-i Āyāt..cf. below). 2. In the course of commenting on Dan 7:9ff he holds that the phrase "...a stream of fire poured out, issuing from his presence" (7:10a Per.trans=از خورش نهر آتشین صادر شد بیرون آمد) has essentially the same meaning as "from his right hand a fiery law went out for them" (Deut 33:2b. Per.trans=از دست راستش شریعت آتشین باشان ریزد); the "stream of fire" (نهر آتشین) and "fiery law" (شریعت آتشین) signify the Divine Will and the Divine Word which are the means of the instruction of souls and the progress of the world of existence. 3.

A large number of Jewish, Christian and Islāmic proof texts are assembled in the well known al-Tibyān wa'l-Burhān. In the discussion of Deut 33:2 it is stated that the reference to Seir signifies the advent of Jesus from Jabal Zaytūn, the "Mount of Olives" and that Mt. Paran alludes to the coming of Muhammad from "a mountain in Mecca named Abū Qubays (Gen 21:21 and Qur'ān 2:128 are also referred to). ربوات القدس, evidently understood as "holy hills" alludes to the coming of Bahā'u'llāh, being a reference to the lowland or hilly area (al-munhadarāt) between Mt. Carmel and ^cAkkā. The author of al-Tibyān wa'l-Burhān thus makes very explicit the allegedly prophetic geographical locations mentioned in Deut 33:2. 4.

1. Jibrān Sassī, Istidlāliyya, p.15.

2. Refer Gulshan-i Haqā'iyiq (Kalimat Press 1982), pp.152-3.

3. Refer, *ibid*, pp.157-8.

4. Refer, Vol.I. (Beirut 1972), pp.129-131. Interesting comment is also made in this work (Vol.I. pp.130-1) on Qur'ān 95:1ff in the light of the location of Bahā'u'llāh's manifestation.

The oriental Bahā'ī interpretation of Deut 33:2 was very early made known and adopted by N.American converts to the Bahā'ī movement. This partly as a result of the presence there between 1900 and 1904 of a number of oriental Bahā'īs learned in Biblical interpretation; most notably ^cAbd al-Karīm Tihranī (d. 190/1?), Mirza Assadallāh Isfahānī (d.c.1923?) and Abū al-Fadl Gulpaygānī (see above). As early as June 29th 1900 ^cAbd al-Karīm had stated in an address delivered in Chicago:

"Look at the 33rd chap. of Deut... This means four appearances of God; - the first refers to the time when God appeared to Moses - in Mt. Sinai; the second, to Christ in the Name of the Son; the third to Mohammed from Mt. Paran and the fourth in Beha'u'llah when He, God the Almighty, came with ten thousand of his saints, and of whom the Bab and all the prophets have spoken."

A little later the early American Bahā'ī Arthur Pilsbury Dodge (d. 1915) in several of his writings gives some interesting interpretations of Deut 33:2. In his The Truth of it he understands Deut 33:2 in the same manner as ^cAbd al-Karīm but adds that the "ten thousands of saints" (so AV) ². "simply refers to those people on this earth who would become actually acquainted with and believers in the TRUTH - not to denizens of some different order or condition, ethereal or otherwise" ³. Commenting on this

1. From Addresses of Abdel Karim Effendi Tehrani..tr.A.Haddad, Chicago 1900), pp.95-6. Note here the representation of Bahā'u'llāh as "God the Almighty" -- uncompromisingly asserted by George Ibrahim Kheiralla (d. 1930) in his early writings and frequently set forth in early occidental Baha'i literature. Indeed, that Deut 33:2 refers to the successive advent of God himself, was not such a problem for Bahā'īs as for Muslim apologists since the latter have regarded Bahā'u'llāh as the eschatological advent of Divinity.
2. Occidental Bahā'īs seem not to have been informed of the oriental Bahā'ī understanding of "ربان القدس" as "from the holy hills" (or the like). They usually comment on the translation contained in the King James version (AV). It is possible, it may be noted here, that the translation "ten thousands of saints" (so AV: which corresponds with the Persian translation, هزاران of the like), has contributed to the inflated numbers of Bābī-Bahā'īs represented in Bahā'ī literature as having been martyred: the reference to the "ten thousands of saints" / هزاران هزاران مقدس having been regarded as being fulfilled by being identified with the Bābī-Bahā'ī martyrs (cf. D. MacEoin, A Note on the Numbers of Babi and Baha'i Martyrs in Iran -- to appear in Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin).
3. Refer, The Truth of It.. (New York, London 1901), p.50. Modern Biblical scholars usually understand "ten thousands of saints" (if this reading be accepted) to refer to the celestial members of God's "heavenly court".

verse in his Whence? Why? Whither?.. he writes,

"..that remarkable prophecy of Moses in the 33rd chapter of Deut.verse 2...has seemed meaningless these many ages for want of an adequate interpretation.Until recently,the remarkable wealth of truth contained therein,has, like an undiscovered gold mine of fabulous value,been ignored by those who have been wholly oblivious or dead to the real truth." 1.

This somewhat naive statement is elaborated at subsequent points in Dodge's abovementioned book.In his chapter on "Symbolic Words of the Bible" he comments on as follows on "Saints" :

" "Saints" .True and faithful believers in God and his spiritual Truth,who are in the flesh and on earth.. [Dan 7:18 quoted].. "And He(Baha'Ullah) came with ten thousands of Saints."(Deut. 33:2).It will be remembered that this was the first time known to the world when a Manifestation [i.e. Baha'u'llah] of God came finding tens of thousands of Saints (believers) ready and waiting for Him!.." 2.

Such is an early and interesting example of the occidental Bahā'ī interpretation of Deut 33:2.Subsequent occidental Bahā'ī writers have, usually in a less fanciful manner, continued to apply Deut 33:2 to the aforementioned four 'manifestations of God' . So the highly respected and influential Bahā'ī writer George Townshend(1876 - 1957 :before his conversion to the Bahā'ī movement Canon of St.Patrick's Cathedral,Dublin and Archdeacon of Clonfert) in his Christ and Baha'u'llah.³ On the other hand ,the lesser known Bahā'ī writer R.F.Riggs in his The Apocalypse Unsealed writes:

" One interpretation of the prophecy is as follows:Moses and Jesus came from Sinai; Muhammad and the Bab rose up from Seir and shined forth from Paran; the advent of the Bab was attended by 10,000 martyrs to His Cause.(cf.Jude 14).Baha'u'llah is He from whose right hand went forth a fiery law in the letters which he addressed to the crowned heads of the earth." 4.

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1. Dodge, Whence?Why?Whither? Man,Things, Other Things (Westwood Mass. 1907),p.26.
 2. Dodge,ibid,p.98. See also pp.217-8,232.
 3. Refer, Christ and Bahā'u'llāh (London 1957),p.32.
 4. Riggs, The Apocalypse Unsealed (New York 1981),p.57.Here,doubtless based on orietnal Baha'i sources,we have an explicit identification of the "ten thousands of saints" (so AV : evidently understood as 10,000) with the (supposed number) of Bābī martyrs.cf.below,p.18 fn.

Various passages in the writings of ^cAbdu'l-Bahā and Shoghi Effendi -- which are authoratative for Bahā'īs-- in general terms confirm the (Islamo-) Bahā'ī application of Deut 33:2 to the missions of Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and Bahā'u'llāh. In a letter of ^cAbdu'l-Bahā (early 19th cent.) which deals with various questions(posed by an American Bahā'ī) including that of the Trinity the following statement is made:

" As to the question of the Trinity, know, O advancer unto God, that in each of the cycles [religious dispensations] when the lights [of prophethood] have shone forth upon the holy ones and the Forgiving Lord hath revealed Himself on Mount Paran or Mount Sinai or Mount Seir there are necessarily three things : The Giver of the Grace [God], and the Grace [the Holy Spirit] and the Recipient of the Grace [the Messenger of God].. " ¹.

This partially quoted explanation of the question of the Trinity which argues that divine revelation has three aspects although not a consubstantial Trinity of three persons obviously alludes to Deut 33:2. Allusion is made in connection with Mt. Sinai, Mt. Seir and Mt. Paran to the prophetic missions of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. The Islāmo-Bahā'ī interpretation of Deut 33:2 is presupposed.

Evidently in response to a question about the problem of locating [Mt.] Seir in Galilee in connection with Deut 33:2 ^cAbdu'l-Bahā has, in another letter, repeated the originally Islāmic transference of the location of this region: " Thou didst write as to Seir. Seir is a locality near Nazareth in Galilee. " ².

Shoghi Effendi has, in a letter dated Dec. 26 1944 confirmed the Islāmo-Bahā'ī ³ of Deut 33:2 and certain other Old Testament texts (all quoted in connection with the mission of the Prophet Muhammad by Muslim writers) that make mention of Mt. Paran: " References in the Bible to "Mt. Paran" .. refers to Muhammad's Revelation [i.e.] Deut 33:2, Gen 21:21, Num 12:16, Num 13:3 .. " ³. In his Lawh-i Qarn after enumerating a large number of titles of the Bāb, Bahā'u'llāh and ^cAbdu'l-Bahā (some of them taken from Biblical texts) he glorifies the ' first Bahā'ī century ' (understood as 1844-1944) and at one point writes:

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1. From a letter of ^cAbdu'l-Bahā quoted and (badly) translated in, Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas ² Vol. L (Baha'i Publishing Committee, New York 1930), p. 117.
 2. From a letter of ^cAbdu'l-Bahā quoted in Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahā (Baha'i World Centre, Haifa, 1978), p. 207.
 3. From a letter of Shoghi Effendi published in Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand: 1923-1957 (Sydney 1971), p. 41

interpretation

A

" Blessed be this most marvellous, wonderful century in which God hath come ["] in the shadows the the clouds["] (cf. Qur'an 2:210), the Spirit [al-Ruh= Jesus] hath risen up the Ancient Beauty [= Bahā'u'llāh] hath emerged from behind the myriad veils of light.. and the Lord hath come with ten thousands of saints (و اتى الرب من ربوات القدس =Deut 33:2b)."^{1.}

That Shoghi Effendi in the latter part of this passage understands the coming of God as the advent of Bahā'u'llāh with 10,000's or myriads of saints and probably not as Ishrāq Khavarī argues in his Rahīq-i Makhtūm (see above)" from the holy hills" (i.e. the Mt. Carmel area) may be gathered from the following passage from his God Passes By (the longer English companion volume to the Persian Lawh-i Qarn also written around 1944);

" To Israel He [Bahā'u'llāh] was neither more nor less than the incarnation of the Everlasting Father[see Isaiah 9:6] the "Lord of Hosts" come down with ten thousands of saints.."^{2.}

Such in outline are the Bahā'ī interpretations of Deut 33:2. They are, for the most part, given the milieu in which Bahā'ī apologetic originated, of considerable interest and ingenuity. From the modern scholarly point of view however, it is difficult if not impossible to maintain that Deut 33:2 was originally intended as a prophecy, that Mt. Seir is located in Galilee, Mt. Paran in or around Mecca and that " ربوات القدس " for סִרְבָּתַי קָדְשׁ signifies "holy hills" (or the like). Taken however, as a "spiritual interpretation" of Deut 33:2 independent of a strictly scholarly methodology, the Bahā'ī interpretation of Deut 33:2 is an excellent example of the way in which Bahā'ī apologists drew upon and creatively developed the Muslim interpretation of Biblical texts.

1. Shoghi Effendi, Lawh-i Qarn (Bombay .nd.), p.

2. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By (Wilmette 1979), p.94.

Additional Note: The term "[Mt] Paran" in Babi-Baha'i scripture.

Though as noted, Baha'u'llah does not (as far as I am aware) quote Deut 33:2 there are a not inconsiderable number of references in his writings to (Mt.) Paran as well as to [Mt] Horeb and Mt. Sinai--often in his more mystical writings (especially those of the Baghdad period: 1853--63) which draw on imagery associated, in the Qur'an and Muslim mystical tradition, with the epiphany of God on Mt. Sinai. In this respect Baha'u'llah is partly indebted to the Bab's writings in which considerable use is made of Sinai imagery along with scattered references to Mt. Paran and Mt. Horeb. In his Tafsir Surat al-Kawthar for example (MSS Browne Coll. Or F 10(7), fol. 30b) the Bāb, in the course of commenting on one of the letter alīfs occurring in sūra 108 writes:

"Then [the letter alif signifies] the hidden, the treasured, the greatest, the pure, the purifying, the blessed name of God [alif being the first letter of ism="name"] unto and through which God shone forth with the lights of the tripartite name. And He made its first station in al-Bahā (the glory), its second station in al-thana' (the praise) and its third station in Mt Sinai and the station of His self (nafs) in al-qadā (the decree) and al-badā (the origination). He it is who manifested its (or his) light upon Mt. Paran (jabal faran) in (or with) the sanctified myriads (bi-ribwatal-muqaddas) and upon Mt. Horeb in (or with) the hosts of the angels of the throne and of the heavens and the earth and upon the cupola of time (qubbat al-zamān) in (or with) former and latter prophets (? reading: bi-nubā'a' al-awwalin wa'l-ākhirin) and upon the Mount (al-Tūr= Sinai) in the Blessed Tree (= 'the Burning Bush') [hence it was said on the Mount]; "O Moses, God, verily, is my Lord and your Lord, no God is there except Him, Lord of the worlds." .." 1.

This passage may be compared with the following (Persian) "Hidden Word" of Bahā'u'llāh (from the Kalimāt-i Maknūna, Per. No. 71, composed Baghdad c. 1858) in which reference is made to Mt. Paran: 2.

" O My Friends!

Call ye to mind that covenant (ahd) ye have entered into with Me upon Mount Paran, situate within the hallowed precincts of Zaman (= time). I have taken to witness the concourse on high and the dwellers of the city of eternity, yet none do I find faithful to the covenant. Of a certainty pride and rebellion have effaced it from the hearts, in such wise that no trace thereof remaineth. Yet knowing this, I waited and

1. It should be noted that this passage in the Bab's Tafsir Surat al-Kawthar is (in part) rooted in though not directly dependent upon, Deut 33:2 (the Bab shows no direct familiarity with the Old Testament) and may be based on the "Prayer of the Signs" (Dūcā-yi Simat) attributed to Imam ^cAlī (see below, p. fn).
2. I quote here Shoghi Effendi's translation, The Hidden Words (NSA of the Baha'is of the British Isles, [London] 1949), p. 48) in which the word zamān (= time) is capitalized as if, like Mt. Paran, it refers to a "mystic locality"; cf. the phrase "cupola of time" (qubbat al-zamān) in the passage from the Bab's Tafsir Surat al-Kawthar translated above (which may even have inspired this "hidden word").

Additional Note: Paran and Mt. Paran in Bābī-Bahā'ī scripture.

Though as noted Bahā'u'llāh does not, as far as I am aware, quote Deut 33:2 there are a not inconsiderable number of references in his writings to Mt Paran as well as to Mt. Horeb and Mt. Sinai—often in his more mystical writings (especially those of the Baghdad period 1853-1863) which draw on imagery associated in the Qur'ān and Muslim mystical tradition, with the epiphany of God on Mt. Sinai. In this respect Bahā'u'llāh is partly indebted to the Bāb who made considerable use of Sinai imagery and occasionally mentioned Mt. Paran and Mt. Horeb. In his Tafsīr Sūrat al-Kawthar for example (Browne Coll. MSS. Or. F.7(10), fol.30b) the Bāb, in the course of commenting on one of the letter alifs contained in Sūra 108 writes:

"Then it [the letter alif] signifies the hidden, the treasured, the greatest, the pure, the purifying, the blessed Name of God [alif=the first letter of ism= name] unto and through which God shone forth with the lights of the tripartite name. And he made its first station in al-Bahā (the splendour), its second station in al-thana' (the praise), and its third station in Sinai (al-Sīnā') and the station of His self (nafs) in al-qada' (the decree) and al-bada' (the origination). He it is who manifested its (or his) light upon Mt. Paran (jabal faran) in (or with) the sanctified myriads (bi-ribwat al-muqaddas) and upon Mt. Horeb in (or with) the hosts of the angels of the throne and of the heavens and the earth and upon the cupola of time (qubbat al-zaman) in (or with) the former and latter announcement (, ? or prophets?: reading nuba'a) and upon the Mount (al-Tur = Sinai) in the Blessed Tree (= 'the burning bush') [through the utterance]; "O Moses, God verily, is my Lord and your Lord, no God is there except him, the Lord of the worlds.."

This passage is, in part, obviously rooted in, though not directly dependent upon Deut 33:2 (the Bāb shows no direct familiarity with the Old Testament) and may also be in part inspired by the "Prayer of the Signs" attributed to Imām ^cAlī.¹ Sinai imagery appears to be related to the disclosure of the light of the greatest name of God in pre-existent and heavenly realms. This kind of imagery was drawn on by Bahā'u'llāh who (like the Bāb) identified himself with the divine being who uttered the Siniatic declaration of Divinity. He also associated the Siniatic disclosure of God's name (cf. Exodus 3:13f) with the greatest name understood as al-bahā' and symbolizing his own name and being and related these ideas to the notion of a pre-eternal covenant.² Thus in the following Persian "Hidden Word" (from the Kalimat-i Maknuna, Per. No. 71 composed Baghdad c.1857), which may even have been inspired by the above passage from the Bāb's writings, we read:

1. See below, p. fn

2. See the tablet of Baha'u'llah on the mission of Moses in Ishraq Khavari (ed), Ma'ida-yi Asmani, Vol. 4, pp. 38-41.

" O My Friends!

Call ye to mind that covenant (ahd) ye have entered into with Me upon Mount Paran, situate within the hallowed precincts of Zaman (= time). I have taken to witness the concourse on high and the dwellers of the city of eternity, yet none do I find faithful to the covenant. Of a certainty pride and rebellion have effaced it from the hearts, in such wise that no trace thereof remaineth. Yet knowing this, I waited and disclosed it not." ¹.

Here Mount Paran is the scene of a pre-eternal covenant understood as having been made with 'pre-existent' human souls and with exalted divine beings as witnesses. This covenant may concern the messianic advent of Bahā'u'llāh himself as the eschatological manifestation of the greatest name (ism-i 'azm) which he had not yet disclosed. He had not made his messianic claims known in the late 1850's when this "hidden word" was composed and consciousness of the need to be faithful to this covenant or identify with him was, in any case, forgotten by 'heedless mankind'.² Among 'Abdu'l-Bahā's comments on this "hidden word" stands the following interesting passage in which the covenant made on Mt. Paran is associated with a timeless (cf. qubbat al-zamān in the Bāb's Tafsīr sūrat al-Kawthar cited above and the expression "the hallowed precincts of Zamān") covenant made with men about a future messianic disclosure and likened to the covenant made by Moses upon Sinai :

"As for the reference in The Hidden Words regarding the Covenant entered into on Mount Paran, this signifieth that in the sight of God the past, the present and the future are all one and the same --whereas relative to man, the past is gone and forgotten, the present is fleeting, and the future is within the realm of hope. And it is a basic principle of the Law of God that in every Pre-phetic Mission, He entereth into a Covenant with all believers-- a Covenant that endureth until the end of that Mission, until the Promised Day when the Personage stipulated at the outset of the Mission is made manifest. Consider Moses, He who conversed with God, Verily, upon Mount Sinai, Moses entered into a Covenant regarding the Messiah [Jesus], with all those souls who would live in the days of the Messiah. And those souls, although they appeared many centuries

1. I quote here Shoghi Effendi's translation, The Hidden Words (London 1949), p.48 in which the word zaman (= time, or here the timeless realm) is capitalized indicating a "mystic locale" or "transcendent realm".
2. This "hidden word", like other passages in the writings of the Baghdad period of his ministry (1853-1863) could be understood as providing evidence that Bahā'u'llāh already entertained messianic or epiphanic claims which he did not wish to disclose.

after Moses, were nevertheless--so far as the Covenant, which is outside time, was concerned--present there with Moses. The Jews, however, were heedless of this and remembered it not, and they suffered a great and clear loss." 1.

Elsewhere ^CAbdu'l-Baha, who often gave multiple explanations to passages in Bahā'ī and other sacred writings, has stated that the covenant made on Mount Paran signifies the covenant which Baha'u'llah made regarding his successor (cf. his "Book of the Covenant", Kitāb-i Ahd written late ^CAkkā period). i.e. his appointment of ^CAbdu'l-Bahā;

" This covenant [ahd : mentioned in "hidden word" Per. No. 71] and testament is that which the Blessed Beauty [Bahā'u'llāh] made in the Holy Land with the Supreme Pen in the shade of the Tree of Life and which became known after his ascension [his passing in 1892]." 2.

In his Lawh-i Hurūfāt al-Muqatta'a (written late Baghdad period) Baha'u'llah, again refers to Mt. Paran. Having outlined some aspects of the mission of Moses and his encounter with God he writes:

"And this is what was ordained for Moses the son of ^CImran in the cuppola of time (qubbat al-zamān) if you are of those who are informed. And thus beareth witness the Paran of love (Fārān al-hubb) with the Paran of Fire (Fārān al-nār) in the Horeb of Holiness and the Sinai of Nearness if you scan the pages of justice with the eye of God." 3.

Paran is similarly associated with Moses and "love" in Bahā'u'llāh's Kitāb-i Īgān

"And when his [Abraham's] day was ended, there came the turn of Moses. Armed with the rod of celestial dominion, adorned with the white hand of divine knowledge, and proceeding from the Paran of the love of God, and wielding the serpent of power and ever-lasting majesty, He shone forth from the Sinai of light upon the world." 4.

1. From a letter or tablet of ^CAbdu'l-Bahā cited in Selections From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahā (Haifa 1978), p. 207
2. From a letter or tablet of ^CAbdu'l-Bahā, text in Ishraq Khavari (ed), Mā'ida-yi Āsmānī, Vol. 1. p. 56.
3. Text in Ishraq Khavari (ed), Mā'ida-yi Āsmānī, Vol. 4. p. 54.
4. Bahā'u'llāh, Kitāb-i Īgān (tr) Shoghi Effendi, (London 1961), p. 8.

Such are a few of the references to Paran in Bābī-Bahā'ī literature. **which** , since they often occur in somewhat abstruse and mystical contexts cannot be fully discussed here. Paran, it may finally be noted, was used by Bahā'u'llāh as a term signifying Tūn in Khurasan.¹ He wrote letters to the Bahā'īs there addressing them as the "people of Fārān" (or Paran). This perhaps, in the light of the presence in that city of active and prominent Bābīs and Bahā'īs - from the earliest days of the rise of the Bābī-Bahā'ī movement.²

Stephen Lambden

1. See Fāḍil-i Mazandarānī, Āsrār al-Athār Vol. 4. p. 436.

2. For further detail see, Hasan Fu'ādī Bushrū'ī, Tārīkh-i Amrī-yi Khurāsān (MSS), p. 333ff; tablet of Bahā'u'llāh cited in Ishraq Khavari (ed), Mā'ida-yi Āsmānī, Vol. 9. p. 133.