

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 fārān) 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-zamān) in (or with) the former and latter announcement (, ? or prophets?: reading nuba'a) and upon the Mount (al-Tūr = 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 Bab shows no direct familiarity with the Old Testament) and may also be in part inspired by the "Prayer of the Signs" attributed to Imām 'Alī.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 Bab) 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 Bahā'u'llāh on the mission of Moses in Ishraq Khavari (ed), Mā'ida-yi Āsmānī, 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 zamān (= 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^C (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 everlasting 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-Bahá (Haifa 1978), p.207
2. From a letter of 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 addresseing 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

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

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