

Oreb

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Oreb

Oreb (MT *ʾōrēb* is widely held to mean “raven.” This etymology is confirmed by an unprovenanced seal with this name bearing a drawing of a raven; LXX Ωρηβ; Vg. *oreb*) is a rock formation in the Jordan Valley (Judg 7:25; Isa 10:26), which is said to derive its name from a Midianite commander (Judg 7:25; 8:3; Ps 83:12). More probably, it was originally a nesting place for ravens. The toponym *šûr ʾōrēb* (rock of raven) has been secondarily related to a personal name, which is popular in Safaitic and Old South Arabic and, thus, appropriate for a Midianite nobleman. Like Zeeb, the name Oreb is familiar from pre-Islamic Arabic onomasticons. Furthermore, Oreb and Zeeb are a popular word pair in the Old Arabic poetry. Jerome translated Oreb as “raven” or “dry-

ness" (*Nom. hebr.* 33.13), the second translation being probably related to 'Ārābā (arid area).

The name Oreb could be a pun on the Gideon narrative: Oreb (raven) is a bird of prey raiding the Israelites; the Ephraimites brought the head of Oreb across the Jordan (*mē'ēber*, a pun on 'ōrēb by metathesis); and *bēšūr 'ōrēb* is related to *bāšīr* ("vintage," Judg 8:2). At the rock of Oreb, the Midianite commander Oreb was slaughtered by the Ephraimites. Afterwards his head was brought to Gideon. Neither Oreb nor Zeeb seem to be historical persons, their names being formed by taking toponyms that suit best the narrative. Thus, a geographical feature was explained etiologically. The biblical tradition of the victory over Oreb and Zeeb is remembered in Isa 10:26 and Ps 83:11 as testifying to God's power and faithfulness.

The rock formation of Oreb might be identified with sites retaining the biblical name. However, neither Khirbet Jurābe (1660.1370) nor Khirbet Jurābe (1729.1612) are probable sites for the biblical rock of Oreb since both of them lie too far away from all other places. These identifications would only be possible if the Midianites fled to the west up the mountains of Ephraim. The best site for the biblical rock of Oreb would be 'Ushsh el-Ghurāb (1935.1453) (raven nest) on the road through the Jordan Valley, 3 km north of Jericho near the tribal inheritance of Ephraim.

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