

Peor

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Peor

1. Mountain in Moab

Peor (MT *Pě'ôr* = “opening [of the valley]”; LXX Φογωγ; Vg. *Phogor*) is a mountain in Moab to which the Moabite king Balak took the seer Balaam to curse Israel after his first two curses were changed to blessings (Num 23:28); the third attempt on the top of Peor also failed. In a vision Balaam saw Israel sojourning in the plains of Moab opposite the Jordan. Peor must have been near Mt. Nebo, since Beth-Peor is located near Mt. Pisgah (Josh 13:20), which is related to Mt. Nebo (Deut 34:1).

Mt. Peor is also associated with the sites of Beth-Peor/Baal-Peor/Beth-Baal-Peor. According to Num 25 the fertility deity residing at Peor (Baal-Peor) led the Israelites into apostasy before they entered the promised land. Related to the incident at Peor are the intermarriage with foreign women and the idolatrous cult of Baal-Peor. The affair of Peor as told in Num 25 is mentioned with the name Peor in Num 31:16; Josh 22:17; with Baal-Peor in Deut 4:3; Hos 9:10; Ps 106:28. Even the building of an altar in Transjordan by the Reubenites, Gadites, and Manassites is compared to the affair of Peor (Josh 22:17). The Israelites later encamped in the valley opposite of Beth-Peor (Deut 3:29; 4:46) and Moses was buried there (Deut 34:6). The Deuteronomic law is explicitly promulgated in the same region as the affair of Peor.

Eusebius locates Beth-Peor near Mt. Peor and six miles above Livias (*Onom.* 48.4–5) near the Ascent from Livias to Heshbon (*Onom.* 12.23–24) and seven miles from Heshbon (*Onom.* 76.11–12). Eusebius identifies Peor with Beth-Peor (*Onom.* 168.25). Jerome has Fagur instead of Phogor and translates this name with “Mouth’s pelt or he has been wide” (*Nom. hebr.* 18.20), the first suggestion combines *pî* (mouth) and *’ôr* (pelt), the second relies on the stem *p-’-r* (to open).

The site of (Beth-)(Baal-)Peor – with Mt. Peor being the hill on which the site is located – was previously identified with Khirbet eš-Šēkh Jā’il/Khirbet

el-Maḥaṭṭa (2186.1341), matching the information of Eusebius on Bethphogor (*Onom.* 48:3–5). The biblical (Beth-)(Baal-)Peor has been looked for at Khirbet ‘Uyūn Mūsā/Tell el-Mešhed (2202.1318) with an almost square fortress on top of the site dating to the late Iron Age II. At a later date the toponym Peor wandered to Khirbet eš-Šekh Jā’il.

Another possibility for biblical (Beth-)(Baal-)Peor would be Khirbet el-Mušaqqar (2239.1335), the highest peak in the region (878 m above sea level), with archaeological remains dating to the Iron Age and the Persian Period. However, this site – although located on the Roman road from Heshbon to Livias contrary to Khirbet ‘Uyūn Mūsā – is too close to Heshbon and does not match the information of Eusebius. This contradiction is reconciled if the biblical site is on top of the Peor ridge at Khirbet el-Mušaqqar whereas in the Byzantine period the toponym wandered to Khirbet eš-Šekh Jā’il on the western descent.

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2. Town in Judah

As a town in Judah, Peor (Phagor; Φαγορ) is only mentioned in the LXX as part of an additional list of eleven towns that mark the tenth district of Judah (Josh 15:59). The Hebrew names of these towns can be obtained by translating the Greek toponyms back to Hebrew names, some of them well-known. According to the additional LXX text, a Judean Peor was located between Bethlehem and Etam. This site must be differentiated from the better known Transjordanian mount/town/deity. Eusebius is familiar with a village called Peor near Bethlehem (*Onom.* 168.27). Jerome, however, adds that this place was called Faora in his time (*Sit.* 169.21). According to an unprovenanced fiscal bulla of the 7th century BCE, the original name of the Judean Peor might be Pegor.

On account of the preservation of the biblical name in the modern toponym, the Judean Peor/Pegor is usually identified with Khirbet Fājūr

(1641.1193) 7 km southwest of Bethlehem. Due to its location near Bethlehem it fits well with the biblical description. The archaeological evidence at Khirbet Fājūr points to the Iron Age, the Persian and maybe also the Roman and Byzantine Periods. Khirbet Fājūr is a twin site consisting of the northern site at Khirbet el-Ḥumēdiye and the southern site at Khirbet Zakandaḥ (1640.1190) with the spring of ‘Ēn Fājūr in the valley between both hills. Located in the proximity, Khirbet Umm el-Qiṭa‘ (1653.1202) might be related to Peor/Pegor; it contains archaeological evidence from the late Iron Age and Persian Period. If Peor/Pegor is to be identified with Khirbet Umm el-Qiṭa‘, the addition preserved in LXX would be from no earlier than the 7th century BCE.

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