

## BOVINE PETROGLYPHS AT JEBEL MAQLA

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### FIELD REPORT-BOVINE PETROGLYPHS AT JEBEL MAQLA

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Across the valley and slightly to the southeast of Jebel Maqla in northwest Saudi Arabia, a rock formation consisting of multiple reddish-brown granite boulders can be found. It is approximately 15 or so feet high and is at its base about 35 feet across. The rocks tend to flatten out near the top to form a fairly level platform. The boulders themselves are rather large for the most part and collectively seem to reflect a natural geological formation. A cyclone fence completely encircles the rise, and a sign posted by the Department of Antiquities of Saudi Arabia declares the site off limits. What makes this formation stand out from the various others like it in the valley is to be found on the surface of the rocks. On the southern, eastern, and western sides of the formation, numerous rock art carvings or petroglyphs can be found. It appears that they may have also been carved into the western face at one time, but have now been chipped away.



Large rock outcropping with bovine petroglyphs

Depicted there are sparse representations of what appear to be ibex, several human figures, and a few images that are unrecognizable. But by far the most numerous of the animals represented are of bovine creatures, ranging in size from a few inches to several feet in length. Two basic horn patterns are present, and both are remarkably similar to the horn structures found on diverse representations of Egyptian bovine deities from the times of the pharaohs.



One of the bovine representations on the outcropping

Although petroglyphs can be found in numerous other sites within the northwestern region of Arabia as a whole, these bovine groupings were not to be found in any other location near the higher peaks of the Hejaz region on our many excursions into the area.



Another bovine representation on the outcropping

#### OUR PERSONAL CONCLUSIONS

The location of this rock formation just across the valley from Jebel Maqla is most interesting to us. In fact, in light of what remains lie at the base of the mountain itself, this could have far reaching conclusions. What is represented here in the form of engraved cattle on the sides of a large outcropping of rock with a flattened top fits a description found in ancient Biblical scriptures to a tee, without having to massage the data to format your own beliefs.

Exodus 32:1-6 is the story of the making of an idol by the Israelites at the base of Mount Sinai. The idol is made of gold, and is in the form of a calf. It reads as follows:

**32:1 And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.**

2 And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me.

**3 And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron.**

**4 And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.**

**5 And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD.**

Several things stand out here in light of the scripture. Verse 4 tells of Aaron the high priest receiving gold from the people, and fashioning it into a golden calf idol with a graving tool. What is interesting is that the Hebrew word for "graving" is "cheret", and it means to engrave or to chisel with a tool. It is clear that he made a molten idol, because the word "molten" is the Hebrew word "maccakah", which means a fusion of metal or a cast image. But does one use an engraver to make a cast metal image? Not hardly.

Aaron also builds an altar, and makes a weird proclamation to the whole congregation of people. He says, "THESE be thy GODS, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt". Now just prior to that, he'd made one single molten calf. Why would he then turn to the people, and in reference to the same single idol say, "THESE be thy GODS"? It seems to be at best ignorant speech.

Or is it?

The Hebrew word "elohiym" is used for "gods" in verse 4. The meaning is definitely plural, as in many. In fact, the context it is used in implies "many together to make up the one true god". When Aaron tells them that THESE are their GODS, how can he possibly be referring to only a single golden calf?

In another passage we get an even clearer vision from the mouth of Aaron himself. When Moses finally comes down from Mount Sinai and discovers what the people had been up to, he confronts Aaron directly. Aaron says this:

**Ex 32:23-25**

23 For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

**24 And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.**

By his own admission, he made the golden calf by gathering the gold, casting it into the fire, and pulling out a calf. This is the normal procedure for working with metal. He did NOT use the graving tool to create the golden calf. That much is clear. He must have used that chisel for another purpose.

Now if we look closely at the remains again, a picture begins to emerge that is absolutely fascinating. Once again, we have a natural formation of rocks covered with chiseled images of bovine creatures. Didn't we just read that Aaron used a chiseling tool to produce what he called "gods"? What if Aaron actually carved these bovine images onto the rocks here with the graving tool, and placed the molten image he made separately up on top on the flattened surface? (The carving of the rocks was part of the preparation of the altar. He didn't move these boulders into position: he just made what was already there an altar site.) Then, having the deities in place, he built a small altar in front of the whole formation to perform the sacrifice on to them. The congregation would have seen a golden calf sitting high atop a rock formation covered with engraved images of other male and female cattle representations, and Aaron's statement suddenly becomes crystal clear. "THESE (the idol and ALL THE PETRAGLYPHS) be thy GODS that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt"!

Remember where this group of people had just spent 400 years in slavery. Egypt was full of idols and carved images. Apis and Hathor were both bovine gods worshipped during the time that the Hebrews were used as labor to build the monuments of Egypt. Would it be so far fetched to believe that the people would revert back to the only religion they'd known when Moses was gone from their sight and no one knew what had become of him? No, not at all.

In conclusion, it is our belief that the archaeological remains here at this site in the ancient land of Midian display the qualities necessary to make it an excellent candidate for the place where the altar to the golden calf was made.

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