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Historicity of the Garden of Eden: Exploring Lake Van, Qurnah, and Pushkar

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Abstract

We compare the descriptions of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1-3 with the geographical, archaeological and etymological evidences and textual parallels from Lake Van in Turkey, Qurnah in Iraq, and Pushkar in India. We develop a method of simultaneously considering the information from above four parameters to arrive at an overall level of parallel with the Biblical descriptions. We find that the descriptions find 15 percent parallels with Lake Van, 53 percent parallels with Qurnah and 72 percent parallels with Pushkar. This leads us to suggest that a strong case exists for the location of the Garden at Pushkar in India. In particular, we find four rivers coming out of Pushkar as described in the Bible. The historicity of the Bible would be strengthened if the suggestion is found acceptable by the scholars.

Keywords: *Genesis, Garden of Eden, Adam, Eve, Lake Van, Qurnah, Pushkar*

Introduction:

Number of scholars hold that Adam was a physical person who begot a physical son in Seth (Ortlund 2014, 677). Question immediately arises where was the Garden of Eden, where this physical lived, located? The two locations frequently suggested for the Garden are Lake Van in Turkey and Qurnah on the Shatt al-Arab waterway in Iraq. However, the geographical archaeological and etymological evidences and textual parallels from these locations do not credibly match with the Biblical descriptions. We propose a third possible location at Pushkar in India. We make a comparative assessment of the evidences at Lake Van, Qurnah and Pushkar. We develop a simple arithmetical method to simultaneously consider the geographical, archaeological and etymological evidences and textual parallels. We conclude that Pushkar provides a better fit with the Biblical descriptions in comparison with Lake Van and Qurnah. This leads us to suggest that the Garden could be located here. The historicity of the Biblical narrative would be strengthened if this suggestion is found acceptable by the scholars.

Location of the Garden

A number of scholars hold that the Garden of Eden was a specific place (Collins 2020, 69; Brown 1884, 3). Arthur H. Lewis said half a century ago that the text of the Garden of Eden requires a localized, rather than a universal paradise (Lewis 1968, 170). In the same breath he and other scholars say that the location of the Garden is not ascertainable: “No locality has yet been proposed that fits snugly into all of the geographical data” (Lewis 1968, 169). He quotes H. Renckens referring to the Garden as a “Never-never land, whose geography is altogether unreal” (Renckens 1964, 164 quoted in Lewis 1968, 169). Similarly, Gordon Wenham concludes that the problem of the geography is

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“insoluble” (Wenham 2000, 66-67). These difficulties have led some scholars to give up the quest altogether. David Neiman, says that one must, a priori, reject the attempts to identify the location of the Garden by identifying four specific rivers or streams in Mesopotamia (Neiman 1973, 327). Recently, Garcia-Jalon has repeated that the challenge of finding paradise would remain forever open. Lita Cosner and Robert Carter say that the feature of one river splitting into four rivers is seen nowhere in the modern world (García-Jalón 2021, 656; Cosner 2016). These difficulties have led to the questioning of the authenticity of the Biblical narrative itself (Grisanti 2013, 477; Berns 2014, 362).

The first approach to solve this problem is to suggest that the Garden could have been obliterated in the Great Flood (Terry 1886, 368; Morris 1999). However, the courses of ancient rivers can be traced by sediment mapping and remote sensing of the underground moisture (for example, see Clift 2012). Therefore, it should be possible to locate the dead courses of rivers of the Garden.

The second approach is to suggest that the Garden is a mythological place (Neiman 1973, 324). However we may look for the “Garden” that may underpin the mythological descriptions.

The third approach is that the Garden is primarily a spiritual symbol (Wenham 1986, 399). The symbolic value of the Garden, however, would only be enhanced if we were to find a specific place for the same (Grisanti 2013, 496).

Proposed Locations for the Garden

Lewis suggests that the two locations where Eden could possibly be located are the ranges of Kurdistan, where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers rise within a short distance from each other; and near the city of Babylon if the two unidentified currents can be imagined as transversal canals (Lewis 1968, 170; Ojukwu & Dike, 2023). We have referred to these two locations as Lake Van in Turkey and Qurnah on the Shatt al-Arab waterway in Iraq. Along with these two locations we have examined the possibility of the location of the Garden at Pushkar in India.

We were led to the examination of Pushkar by a number of observations made in the last three millennia. Aristotle, as reported by the 1st Century CE Christian Historian Josephus, believed that the Jews came from India (Josephus n.d. Book 1). Megasthenes (350-290 BCE), the Greek ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya in India, wrote that the knowledge about the Jews that was available with the Greeks was simultaneously held by the Brahmins in India (McCrinkel 1972, Fragment 42). More recently, William Jones suggested that Biblical Adam was parallel to Hindu Swayambhuva Manu (Jones 1799, 313). Thomas William Doane drew a parallel between Adam and Hindu Swayambhuva on the strength of both living at a place with four rivers in 1882 (Doane 1882, 26). Mircea Eliade suggested that the creation of Eve from Adam’s ribs was parallel to the primeval pair of Yama and Yami described in the Rig Veda (Eliade 1958, 423). Joseph Campbell drew parallel between the making of woman from man’s ribs in Genesis 2:21-22 with the splitting of the primeval being into husband and wife as described in the Hindu texts (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1:4:3-4; Campbell 1962, 9-10). These parallels point towards the possibility of the Garden being located in India.

Methodology

Most efforts to locate Eden have been made on a standalone basis, that is, by examining the parallels between the Biblical descriptions and the evidences available at a single place. For example, David Rohl has advocated the location of Eden at Lake Van; and Carol A. Hill has suggested its location at

Qurnah—both on a standalone basis (Rohl n.d.; Hill 2000). Such studies do not enable us to make a comparative evaluation. We make a departure in making a comparative evaluation the evidences at the three proposed locations, namely, Lake Van, Qurnah and Pushkar on the following four parameters.

Geography. We examine whether the geographical situation parallels with the descriptions in Gen. 1-3.

Archaeology. We examine whether the archaeological evidence is available from the location at c. 4000 BCE, the approximate time of Adam suggested by Archbishop Ussher (Barr 1984).

Names. We examine whether the names given in the Bible find phonetic parallels in the area. The origins of the Hebrew Language have been investigated by using this method (Eytan 2018). In addition to phonetic parallels, we have also examined whether the embedded meanings of the names are parallel even though the names may be phonetically dissimilar (Rosette Text Analytics n.d.).

Parallels in the Texts. We examine whether parallels to the Biblical narratives are available in the ancient texts prevalent at the three locations.

The establishment of these parallels necessarily has to begin with an understanding of the Biblical text. A number of scholars have pointed out that it is necessary to understand the text properly or correctly (Groningen 1970, 218; Merrill 2015, 669; Harris 2011, 177). As pointed out by Eugene H. Merrill, “the personal preferences and unavoidable emotional investment” of the researcher informs and distorts the methods the individual employs and the conclusions he or she eventually reaches (Merrill 2015, 669). Likewise Samuel Sandmel had called for giving special attention to the distinctions between the narratives (Sandmel 1962, 2). In order to do so we examine the texts in three categories: parallel, distinct and silent.

Some evidences are weak or shallow. We use our professional assessment and mark such evidence as a “weak parallel” or a “weak distinction.”

Some descriptions are available in the apocrypha such as Josephus or Enoch. We have treated these at par with the Bible since those relied upon by us are consistent with the Bible and they add to the Biblical descriptions.

Scholars often delve into the parallels between the Biblical narrative on one parameter. However, we have examined the parallels on four parameters at three locations. This gives us 12 sets of information. Then, in order to condense this matrix, we have converted the information into percent (Scacewater 2016). We have calculated the percent parallels in the following steps.

Step 1: Classify the Information. We have given a Summary Table at the end of each subsection classifying the observations in the categories of Parallel (P), Weak Parallel (PW), Silence (S), Distinction (D) and Weak Distinction (DW).

Step 2: Give Numbers. We have given (+)1 point to a Parallel “P,” (+) 0.5 point to a Weak Parallel “PW,” 0 point to a Silence “S,” (-)1 points to a Distinction “D” and (-) 0.5 point to a Weak Distinction “DW” in the last line of the Summary Table.

Step 3: Net Value. We have added these numerical points to give a “net” value in the last line of the table. For example, if P=6, S=4 and D=2, then we get (+) 6 points for “P” less (-) 2 points for “D” giving a net value of (+) 4.

Step 4: Convert to Percentage. We have divided the “net value” arrived at Step 3 by the total numbers of observations to arrive at a percent value. In the example above, the numbers are P=6, S=4 and D=2. We add these to obtain total 12. We then divide the “net value” of (+) 4 arrived at Step 3 by the total 12 to arrive at a percent value which, in this case, equals $4/12 \times 100$ or 33 percent.

We have calculated the average of these percent values for the four parameters in the last section of this paper. This average gives us an assessment of the overall level of parallels at that location.

A Note on the Sources

We have quoted from the Revised Standard (Common) Version of the Bible in English.

Many words in the Hebrew Bible have multiple meanings. Evidence could be classified as “parallel” or “distinct” depending upon which meaning we adopt. We have selected those meanings that support the parallels. For example, in Genesis 2:7 it is stated that God formed the Adam from “dry earth; dust.” We find that the meaning “dust” parallels with the narratives from the three locations. Therefore, we accept this meaning among the many. We give the maximum leeway to every location.

We have relied largely upon David Rohl for the geography at Lake Van; and Piotr Taracha for the textual evidences from the area. We have relied on Geologist Carol A. Hill for geography at Qurnah. We have relied on the Enuma Elish and supplemented it with the Legend of Atrahasis and the statements of Berossus for textual parallels from this area. We have relied on our own studies for the geography at Pushkar. We have relied on the Vayu Purana to trace the parallels in the narratives at this location (Tagare 1987). We have taken the liberty of providing a number of pictures from Pushkar since we are introducing this location.

We now examine the match of the Biblical descriptions at the three locations on the four parameters. We first state the Biblical descriptions on each observation. Then we examine how far the geography at the location matches with those descriptions.

Geography

The defining geographical feature of Eden are the four rivers (Harris 1968, 179; Lewis 1968, 170-171). However, more information is available from the apocrypha that is consistent with the Bible. We have treated this information at par with the Bible because we would like to consider as many information as may be possible.

Eastward location

The Bible says, “The Lord God planted an orchard in the east, in Eden...” (Gen. 2:8). Gordon Wenham suggests that “east” refers to the location of Eden east of Israel (Wenham 2000, 61). Thus we examined the direction of the proposed locations from Israel. Lake Van is located north of Israel and does not parallel with this description while Qurnah and Pushkar are located east of Israel and parallel with this statement.

Erythraean Sea

The Book of Enoch says that Enoch saw a vision in which he went towards the east, passed above the Erythraean Sea, and came to the Garden of Righteousness (Enoch 32.3). The text “Voyage around the Erythraean Sea,” written by an anonymous merchant in first century CE, mentions that two ports named Barbaricum and Barygaza were located on the rim of this sea in India (Anonymous 1st century CE). Thus, the Erythraean Sea would refer to the Indian Ocean and the Garden of Righteousness, there being available no information to the contrary, would refer to the Garden of

Eden. This location parallels with Pushkar and not with Lake Van or Qurnah there being no Erythraean Sea between Israel and these locations.

One River Parted into Four, Subterranean Ocean

The Bible says that a river went out of Eden and parted into four rivers (Gen. 2:10). Gordon Wenham, author of the Word Biblical Commentary, suggests that a subterranean ocean fed this River (Wenham 2000, 64). We shall discuss the existence of one river and the subterranean ocean in this subsection and four rivers in the next subsection.

Rohl suggests that the one river is a spring on Mount Sahand at Lake Van (Rohl n.d.). This is parallel to the Bible. The four rivers, discussed in detail in the next subsection, emerge at considerable distance from Lake Van thus the water of the spring does not “part” into four rivers and there is no “subterranean ocean” feeding this spring. We consider these latter two points to be distinct.

Hill suggests the Nahar River could be a spring that was flowing from the aquifer Dammam Formation that lies beneath Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain (Hill 2000). This aquifer is parallel to a subterranean ocean. However, the aquifer is not known to flow on the surface of the earth but that also cannot be precluded. Hence, we consider the “one river” to be a weak parallel. Further, the water of the aquifer is not known to split into four and we consider this to be distinct.

There is a lake named Budha Pushkar at Pushkar as shown in Figure 1. The lake is located between two small mountain ranges. The underground water from these mountains fed lake and could be the “subterranean ocean.”

Archaeologists confirm that the Lake virtually never went dry and this support the lake being fed from these subterranean hill waters (Allchin 1974, 358-368).



Figure 1: Budha Pushkar with pumping station in the background. Photo: Author, January, 2008.

The word “Nahar” is generally translated as “river.” However, it is used as “waters” in Ps. 24:2 and Jon 2:3; and for “floods” in Ps. 93:3. Thus, “nahar” could also be used for a lake as at Pushkar. Yet we consider this to be a weak parallel because the larger use of the word Nahar is for a river than a lake.

Four Rivers

The Bible says that four rivers named Pishon, Gihon, Perath, and Hiddekel, flowed out of the Garden (Gen. 2:10-14). Further, the Targum Pseudo Jonathan says that the Gihon carried the waters of the Pishon (Etheridge 1862, Exodus 13:17).

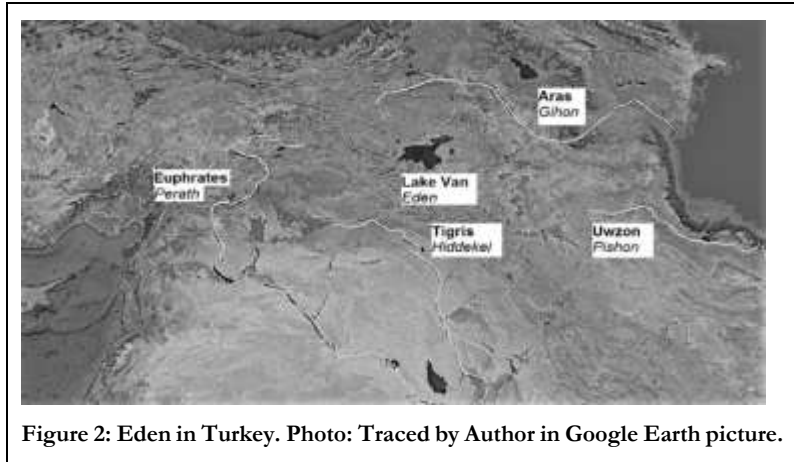


Figure 2: Eden in Turkey. Photo: Traced by Author in Google Earth picture.

Rohl has suggested that Hiddekel is the Tigris, Perath is the Euphrates, Gihon is the Aras, and Pishon is the Uwzon River at Lake Van as marked in Google Earth picture in Figure 2 (Rohl n.d.). The four rivers are parallel to the Biblical descriptions. However, the Aras (Biblical Gihon) does not carry the waters of the Uwzon (Biblical Pishon). We consider this to be a distinction.

At Qurnah, as at Lake Van, the Hiddekel and Perath are suggested to be the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Pishon is suggested to be Wady Ermek and Gihon is suggested to be the Karun River as shown in Figure 3 (Hill 2000). However, the Bible tells of four rivers going out of the Garden while these rivers are coming into each other here. This problem is explained as the waters of the four rivers joining and then going out to the Persian Gulf (Hill 2000, 17). We consider this to be a weak parallel because the Bible does not tell of the four rivers joining before flowing out.

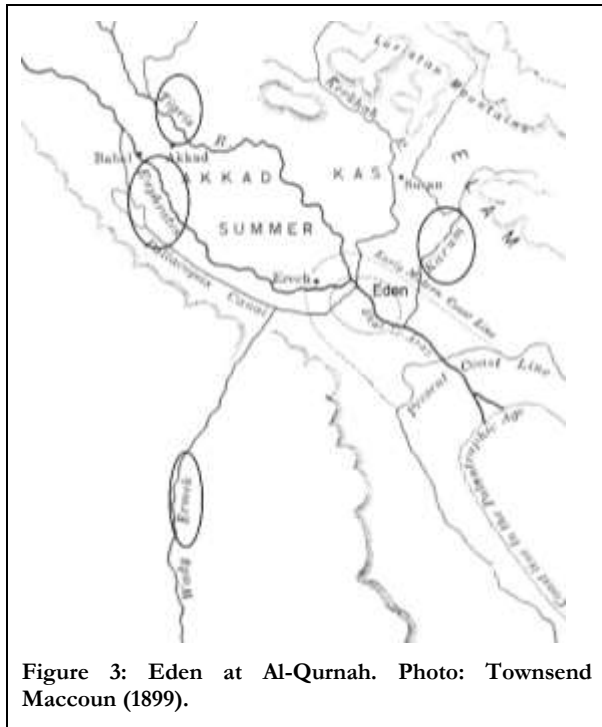


Figure 3: Eden at Al-Qurnah. Photo: Townsend Maccoun (1899).

The Karun (Biblical Gihon) and Wady Ermek (Biblical Pishon) flow into Qurnah from east and west respectively and do not carry the waters of each other. We consider Qurnah to be distinct on this point.

Four rivers named Sagarmati, Saraswati, Nahar, and Dai flow to the south, west, north and east respectively from Pushkar as shown in Figure 4. The Sagarmati flows near the city of Pisangan. This name resembles Pishon. The river may be called Pishon in the Bible after the name of this city. We identify the Saraswati as Gihon, Nahar as Perath, and Dai as Hiddekel for reasons that will be

elaborated subsequently. These four rivers are parallel with the four rivers of the Garden mentioned in the Bible.

The Saraswati carries the water of the Sagarmati from Govindgarh onwards as shown in the figure. This parallel to the Gihon carrying the waters of the Pishon as told in the Targum Pseudo Jonathan.

Pishon Flows in Circle

The Bible says that the Pishon “encompasses the whole land of Havilah.” The word “Havilah” means “circle” (Strong’s 02341; Albright 1922, 18). The Sagarmati indeed makes a semicircle as it flows from Pushkar to Govindgarh as shown in Figure 4. This is parallel to the Biblical descriptions. The Tigris (Biblical Hiddekel) does not flow in a semicircle at Lake Van and Qurnah and we consider this to be distinct.

Eastward River Flows South

Enoch says, “to the east there was a stream and it flowed towards the south...” (Charles 2004). The east-flowing Uwzon at Lake Van flows directly east and does not parallel with Enoch. The Karun flows southwest into Qurnah and does not parallel with Enoch. These are distinct. The Dai emerges from the southeast of Pushkar and flows to the south and is parallel with Enoch.

Zahab, Bdelium and Shoham

These three materials are associated with the Pishon River (Gen. 2:11-14). First of these is *zahab*. Root of the word *zahab* is “to shimmer” (Net Bible Strongs 02091). It has conventionally been associated with gold perhaps due to its shimmering nature. Gold was found from at least 1800 BCE in Anatolia (Paterakis 2015, 106-114). The Mahd adh Dhahab gold mine is located near Wadi Batin (Hill 2000). Gold is not available near Pushkar. However, the yellow emerald found in the area south of Pushkar has the qualities of both yellow colour and shimmering and could be indicated by *zahab* (Department of Mines and Geology n.d.). Thus, we mark this description to be parallel at all the three locations.

Bdelium is a gum resin (Net Bible Strongs 0916). A resin called “Levant storax” is obtained from the forests near Lake Van (Langenheim 2003, 347). Myrrh, a type of bdellium, grows in al-Marwah near Qurnah (Hill 2000, 10). People harvest an aromatic gum resin is extracted from the guggulu plant near Pushkar. Thus, *bdellium* is found at all the three locations.

Shoham is a precious stone, probably a beryl from its pale green color (Net Bible Strong’s 07718). Semi-precious emerald was used in Alacahöyük graves in Anatolia and could be the Biblical *shoham* (Anatolia Jewelry n.d.). A cryptocrystalline quartz that is color-banded occurs near Qurnah and may

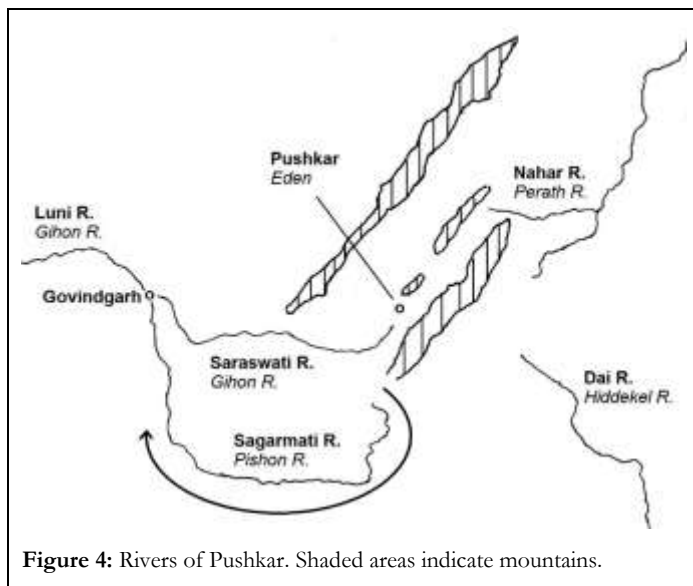


Figure 4: Rivers of Pushkar. Shaded areas indicate mountains.

be considered to be *shoham* (Hill 2000, 9). Beryl is found near Pushkar (Department of Mines and Geology n.d.). Thus, the three materials are found at the three locations.

Mountain

The Garden is told to be located atop a mountain in Ezek. 28:14, 16. Lake Van is located atop the Anatolian Mountains and is parallel to this Biblical description; while Qurnah is located in the Shatt al-Arab valley and is distinct.

Pushkar is located barely 55 meters higher than the surrounding plains. However, it is surrounded by higher mountains. One accesses Pushkar through a pass as shown in Figure 5. The Bible could refer to Pushkar as a “mountain” in reference to these surrounding mountains. We consider this to be a weak parallel.

Plentiful

The Hebrew word “gan” used for the Garden means an “enclosed garden” (Gen. 2:8; Net Bible Strong’s 01588). The word “eden” means “pleasure” (Net Bible Strong’s 05731). These words give a sense of plentifulness (Berns 2014, 351). The area of Lake Van was fragile and susceptible to repeated degradation and is distinct from such a description (Woodring



Figure 5: Approach to Pushkar Mountain from Ajmer. Photo: Author, September 2016.

2001/2002). Qurnah is located in the heartland of fertile Mesopotamia and is parallel. Pushkar has an artesian lake that provided for cultivation of crops like sugar cane as late as 1985 when the author visited and is parallel to the Biblical description.

We now summarize the geographical information from the three locations at Table 1.

Table 1: Geography

No	Biblical Description	Lake Van	Points	Qurnah	Points	Pushkar	Points
1	East	North	D	East	P	East	P

2	Across the Erythraean Sea	Armenia, contiguous land.	D	Mesopotamia, contiguous land.	D	India	P
3	One river.	Spring on Mount Sahand.	P	Spring from Dammam Formation is not known.	P _w	Budha Pushkar lake.	P _w
4	Subterranean ocean.	No Subterranean source.	D	Dammam Formation.	P	Subterranean source.	P
5	Parts into four rivers.	No parting of waters.	D	No parting of waters.	D	Parts into two rivers.	P _w
6	Four rivers flowed out of the Garden	Tigris, Euphrates, Aras, Uwzon	P	Four rivers Tigris, Euphrates, Wady Ermek, Karun join before going out.	P _w	Sagarmati, Saraswati, Nahar and Dai	P
7	Gihon carries waters of the Pishon	Aras does not carry waters of Uwzon	D	Karun does not carry waters of Wady Ermek.	D	Sagarmati carries waters of Saraswati	P
8	Pishon encircles the land of Havilah.	Uwzon does not flow in circle.	D	Wady Ermek does not flow in circle.	D	Sagarmati-Pisangan flows in semi-circle	P
9	Eastward river flows south.	Uwzon flows east.	D	Karun flows inward from northeast.	D	Dai emerges from southeast and flows south.	P
10	“Zahab” is found in the area.	Gold at 1800 BCE.	P	Mahd adh Dhahab gold mine.	P	Yellow emerald is found in the area.	P
11	“Bdellium” is found in the area.	“Levant storax” is obtained in the area.	P	Myrrh at Yemen.	P	Aromatic resin guggulu is found in the area.	P
12	“Shoham” is found in the area.	Emerald, a beryl type of stone.	P	Crypto-crystalline quartz called chert.	P	Beryl.	P
13	Mountain	Lake Van located atop mountains.	P	Qurnah located in a valley.	D	• Pushkar located atop small mountain.	P _w
14	Plentiful	Fragile.	D	Plentiful.	P	Plentiful.	P
15	Summary.	P=6, S=0, D=8; Net= (+)6 (-)8= (-) 2/14 or (-) 14%.		P=6, P _w =2, S=0, D=6; Net= (+)7 (-)6= (+)1/14 or 7%.		P=11, P _w =3, S=0, D=0; Net= (+)12.5 = (+)12.5/14 or 89%.	

Archaeology

Merrill says that if the results of an archaeological investigation “appears to weaken or even totally undermine the case for a biblically-based interpretation of a text, then both the interpretation and the archaeological conclusions should be held in abeyance until a definitive harmonization or compelling reinterpretation of the data on either or both sides of the case can be achieved” (Merrill 2105, 674). Following this lead, we have made a comparative assessment of the available archaeological evidence at the three locations.

Habitation

Bishop Ussher had arrived at a time for the birth of Adam on genealogical considerations at 4004 BCE (Barr 1984). Thus, we examine the archaeological evidences of human habitation at this time.

The oldest traces of human activity have been found at Tilkitepe Mound located along the shores of Lake Van from the *end* of the fourth millennium BCE (Iza 2018). Thus, habitation at c. 4000 BCE is not attested. However, the populations of the steppes summered their herds in these mountains (Badalyan 2004, 399-420). It cannot be precluded that the area may have been inhabited at c. 4000 BCE by these herdsmen. Hence, we consider this to be a weak distinction.

Plants were domesticated about 10,000 years ago between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Rutledge 2020). Camping sites with small stone tool industries from the prehistoric times are found at Pushkar (Allchin 1983, 68). Thus, we consider these sites to be habited at c. 4000 BCE.

Crop Cultivation

God said to Adam: “you will eat the grain of the field by the sweat of your brow” (Gen. 3:17-19). This suggests that cultivation was undertaken in Eden.

Farming had started in Anatolia between 8,300-7,800 BCE though not at Lake Van (Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History 2019). The fragile nature of the area also augurs against cultivation in the area. However, cultivation near Lake Van cannot be ruled out; hence, we consider this to be a silence rather than a distinction.

Crop cultivation was undertaken in the Tigris and Euphrates Basins before 4000 BCE as mentioned in the previous sub-section. We consider this to be parallel.

Agriculture started in the 8-7th millennium BCE at Mehrgarh in the Balochistan area of the Indus Valley (Kumar 2018). Evidence of cultivation is available from 3300 BCE at about 400 kilometers southwest of Pushkar (Harris 2011, 38). However, we do not have evidence of cultivation specifically at Pushkar at c. 4000 BCE hence we consider this to be a silence.

Now we summarize the archaeological evidence from the three locations in Table 2.

Table 2: Archaeology

No	Biblical Description	Lake Van	Points	Qurnah	Points	Pushkar	Points
1	Archaeological Evidence of habitation, c. 4000 BCE.	Earliest habitation at end of 4 th millennium BCE.	D _w	Habitation from 10,000 BCE.	P	Habitation from 200,000 years ago to Bronze Age.	P
2	Cultivation.	Fragile area.	S	Domesticated plants in 10,000 years ago.	P	Agriculture at Mehrgarh 8 th millennium BCE.	S
	Summary	P=0, S=2, D _w = (-) 0.5; Net= (-) 0.5/2 or (-) 25%.		P=2, S=0, D=0; Net= (+)2= (+)2/2 or 100%.		P=1, S=1, D=0; Net= (+)1 or (+)1/2 or 50%.	

Names

Scholars have relied on parallels in the names in the local literature to establish the location of Eden (Lewis 1968, 169; Harris 1968, 178). We follow this method.

Eden

A name parallel to “Eden” is not attested at Lake Van or Pushkar. A number of scholars have noted that the word could be parallel to Akkadian “edin” or Assyrian “edinu” meaning “field,” “plain,” or “desert” (Harris 1968, 178; Brown 1884). We consider this to be parallelat Qurnah.

Nahar

The Bible says that a “Nahar” went out of Eden and parted into four rivers (Gen. 2:10). The word “Nahar” is not attested at Lake Van or Qurnah.

A river named “Nahar” emerges from the northeast of the Budha Pushkar Lake as marked by an arrow in Figure 6. It is mentioned in the map as “Nahar Nadi” or “Nahar River.” A distinction is that the Bible uses the name “Nahar” for the one river that divided into four while the same name “Nahar” is used at Pushkar for one of the four rivers. For this reason, we consider this to be a weak parallel.

Four Rivers

The names Perath and Euphrates have the common consonants “p,” “r,” and “t/th” at Lake Van. The Gihon is suggested to be the Aras River because the name “Gaihun” used by Islamic scholars for this river is similar. The Pishon is suggested to be the Uwzon River because the letter “U,” if changed to “P,” becomes Pwzon that is similar to Pishon (Rohl n.d.). We consider these to be parallel. However, we do not find a name similar to Hiddekel at Lake Van and consider this to be silent.

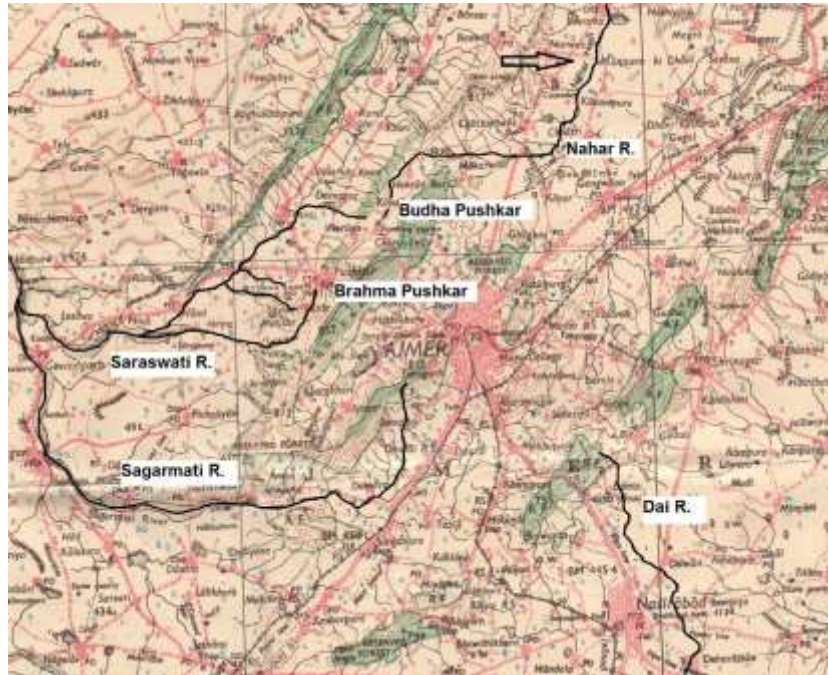


Figure 6: Rivers of Pushkar. We have labeled and darkened the course of the rivers. Arrow points to the name “Nahar Nadi” written on the map. Photo: Survey of India (1978).

The name Perath parallels with the name Euphrates at Qurnah as at Lake Van. Pishon and Gihon do not show parallels with the names of Wady Ermek and Karun River. We consider these to be silences because the existence of a similar name in the earlier period cannot be ruled out.

Dan. 10:4 says Daniel was standing on the banks of either an unnamed “great” river or the Hiddekel-Tigris River. This event is located in the plains of Mesopotamia. The Tigris River in Aramean is called “Digla” and in Arabic “Diglat.” These forms concord with the Hebrew form “Dekel.” By adding the prefix “Hid,” we get the name Hiddekel (McClintock and Strong Bible Cyclopedia). Thus, the name Hiddekel is connected with the name “Tigris.” We do not attribute this parallel with Tigris at Lake Van because there is no association of Daniel with Lake Van.

The name Euphrates does not show a parallel at Pushkar. A possible parallel to the name Gihon may be embedded in the Sanskrit word “*gaban*.” The first part of this word “*gab*” means “to enter deeply into.” The latter part of this word “*abana*” means “an abyss, depth, water” (Monier-Williams 1987, 352). The word *gaban*, therefore, means “to enter deeply into water.” The west-flowing Saraswati at Pushkar is both the largest and longest of the four rivers at Pushkar, hence the name “*gaban*” could be used for this river. The word “*gaban*” is cognate with Biblical name “Gihon” and we consider this to be parallel.

The name Hiddekel, as said above, bereft of the prefix “Hid,” becomes “Dekel.” The Sanskrit word for “south” is “*dakshin*” which has the same sounds “d” and “k” and becomes “*Dak*” bereft of the suffix “shin.” “*Dak*” could then get corrupted as “Dai.” Thus, Hiddekel > Dekel > Dakshin > Dak

> Dai which is the name of the eastward river flowing to the south at Pushkar. We consider this to be parallel.

The Sagarmati flows near the town of Pisangan as noted previously and may be known as Pishon in the Bible.

Havilah

The author of Targum Jonathan, translates Havilah as “Hindki”—an Aramaic translation for India” (Wolf n.d.). The first part of this name “Hind” is related to India in Persian (Steingass n.d., 1514). The main religion of India is Hinduism and the main language is Hindi. Thus, we consider Havilah, Hindki and Hindi to be cognate and associated with India. To our knowledge, this name is not attested at Lake Van or Qurnah.

Cherubim

God placed Cherubim at the Garden (Gen. 3:24). David Rohl has suggested that the name “Kherudabad” of the town lying to the east of Lake Van may provide a link to the name Kerubim (Rohl 1998). Gordon J Wenham has pointed out that in Akkadian *kuribu* were the traditional guardians of holy places in the ancient Near East (Wenham 1986, 401). We consider these to be parallel. We do not find a parallel to this name at Pushkar and consider this to be a silence.

Moriah

The Targum says that after being banished from Eden, Adam, “went and dwelt on Mount Moriah” (The Targums of Onkelos, Gen. 3:22).

We do not find a name similar to “Moriah” at Lake Van. However, the ancient name of Mesopotamia, “Sumer” carries within it the consonants “m” and “r” that are also present in the name “Moriah.” Thus, we consider this to be parallel.

A living tradition identifies the ancient Mount Meru with the mountains around Mansarovar Lake in the Tibet Himalayas (Valdiya 2012, 84). The names “Moriah” and “Meru” have the same consonants “M” and “r” hence we consider these names to be parallel. We ignore the discrepancy that the name Meru is associated with the Himalaya Mountains and not with the mountain at Pushkar because they form part of the same larger area; and here we are considering the parallels with the names.

We now give the summary of evidence regarding names at Table 3.

Table 3: Names

No	Biblical Description	Lake Van	Points	Qurnah	Points	Pushkar	Points
1	Eden	-	S	Edin	P	-	S
2	Nahar	-	S	-	S	Nahar River.	P _w

3	Perath	Euphrates	P	Euphrates	P	-	S
4	Gihon	Aras-Gaihun	P	-	S	Gahan-deep	P
5	Pishon	Uwzon	P	-	S	Sagarmati-Pisangan	P
6	Hiddekel	-	S	Hiddekel-Dekel-Digla-Tigris	P	Hiddekel-Dekel-Dakshin-Dai	P
7	Havilah, Hindki	-	S	-	S	Hindi, Hindustan	P
8	Cherubim	Kherudabad	P	Akkadian kuribu.	P	-	S
9	Moriah	-	S	Sumer	P	Meru-Tibet	P
10	Summary.	P=4, S=5, D=0; Net= (+)4= (+)4/9 or 44%.		P=5, S=4, D=0; Net= (+)5= (+)5/9 or 56%.		P=5, P _w =1, S=3, D=0; Net= (+)5.5= (+)5.5/9 or 61%.	

Parallels in Texts

Certain narratives in the Bible, such as that of the serpent beguiling Eve to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, find no parallels with the Hittite, Sumeric, and Hindu texts. We have not mentioned these in our discussion.

A brief discussion of the sources of the legends of creation is in order before we trace the parallels.

Lake Van. Domestication of grains is known in Anatolia at 10th millennium BCE and ceramics are known from 6200 BCE (Taracha 2009, 8). Let us name these people “proto-Hattians.” However, the legends of creation of these earliest inhabitants of the are not available to us. Nevertheless, a possible connection with the Bible is available through the Hittites. Heth was son of Canaan and ancestor of the Hittites (Gen. 10:15; 23:3, 7). This would be approximately at the time of the Flood c. 3000 BCE. Then, at c. 2000 BCE, Abraham bought land from Ephron the Hittite (Gen. 23:16). The location of these Hittites is not mentioned in the Bible. However, they may be living south of Lake Van since around 1800 BCE the Hittites invaded the area from the southeast and conquered the Hattians who were living there at that time. The invading Hittites then adopted the Hatti culture (Singer 2007).

The trajectory of the earliest legends of creation of the proto-Hattians would then be as follows. The proto-Hattians (6200 BCE) > Adam (4000 BCE) > Hittites invaded the area and absorbed the legends of proto-Hattians when they adopted the Hatti culture (1800 BCE). Thus, the Hittite legends may provide us with the legends of creation at the time of Adam (Taracha 2009, 7).

Another difficulty is that the available Hittite legends do not tell of “creation.” However, we feel that it would be inappropriate to consider Lake Van to be “silent” on these legends merely because they are not available to us. Therefore, we use the motifs in the Hittite legends as a proxy for the legends and examine the parallels with Biblical motifs. Accordingly, while we compare the narrative of creation in the Bible with the legends in Sumer and India; while we compare the *motifs* in the Biblical and Hittite legends to assess the parallels at Lake Van.

Qurnab. We shall rely on *Enuma Elish*, *Atrabasis* and the history of Berossus.

Pushkar. The Vayu Purana gives the narrative of Brahma—the creator—and his spiritual son Swayambhuva Manu—the first man—in greatest detail among the Hindu texts (Mani 1975, 483).

These legends are coalesced into one narrative of creation in the Bible. Thus, we shall compare the Biblical narrative with those of Brahma or Swayambhuva Manu as the case may be.

With this preamble we examine the parallels between the creation narratives at the three locations.

“Elohim” and “Yahweh”

The name “Elohim” is used for God in Gen. 1:1 through 2:3. Hereafter, additionally the name “Yahweh Elohim” or standalone “Yahweh” is used. The Jewish Encyclopedia explains that name “Elohim” is used as the name of the “One” God of Israel while “Yahweh” is used as a “personal name” of the God of Israel (McLaughlin n.d.).

The Hittite legends tell of the Mother Goddess Hannahanna who guided the Storm God how to overcome hunger (Hoffner 1990, 15-20). These point to two divine levels and may be considered to be a weak parallel to the motifs of Elohim and Yahweh respectively.

The Enuma Elish says:

- When the heavens above did not exist,
And earth beneath had not come into being
- There was Apsû, the first in order, their begetter,
And demiurge Tia-mat, who gave birth to them all.
- They had mingled their waters together,
- before land had coalesced... (Mark n.d., I:1-6).

We consider the two to be a weak parallel to Elohim and Yahweh because the latter have no gender while the former are male and female.

The name “Brahman” is used in verse 8:1 of the Vayu Purana. It means “the Self-existent, the Absolute, the Eternal” (Monier-Williams 1987, 738). The name “Brahma” is used from verse 8:2 through Chapter 10 (Monier-Williams 1987, 738). Brahma undertakes the creation of the material world. Brahma is more tangible than Brahman just as Yahweh is more tangible than Elohim. We consider these to be parallel to the Bible.

Creation of Heavens and Earth

There are three modules in Gen. 1:1-2: (1) Creation of heaven and earth; (2) Watery darkness; and (3) Spirit moving on the waters.

The Hittite legends tell of heaven and “dark earth” in the same verse and mention a “watery abyss” (Hoffner 1990, 33, 42). However, there is no mention of spirit moving on the waters (Hoffner 1990, 12). The first two modules are parallel, the third module is silent.

There is mention of a period when the heavens and earth did not exist in the quote from *Enuma Elish* given above. By implication, they came to exist later. This is parallel to the creation of heaven and earth mentioned in the Bible. There is also the mention mingling of the waters while there is silence on the Spirit moving on the waters. Thus, we consider the first two modules to be parallel and the third to be silent.

The Vayu Purana says: “Brahma assumed the form of wind in that darkness when the entire earth was covered with waters and [he] kept roaming here and there” (Tagare 1987, 8:2-3). There is no

reference to the creation of the heavens. There is reference to watery darkness and the Spirit moving on the waters. The first module is silent, the latter two modules are parallel.

Appearance of Dry Ground

Genesis 1:9 tells us of the appearance of dry land out of water.

A Hittite legend tells of the king establishing the House out of the watery abyss (Hoffner 1990, 12). The quotation from the Enuma Elish given above says, “before land had coalesced...” implying that the land appeared thereafter. The Vayu Purana says that, “the Lord entered the undifferentiated matter and... established [the earth] above the waters (Tagare 1987, 8:7-8). Thus, all the three texts are parallel to the Bible.

Separation of Day from the Night

Genesis 1:17-18 tells of the separation of light from the darkness. The Hittite legends are silent on this point. Berossus says, “Bel also created the stars and the sun and the moon and the five planets” (Berossus n.d.). The Vayu Purana tells of the creation of moon, sun and other planets (Tagare 1987, 8:16-17). The Hittite texts are silent while the Sumeric and Hindu texts are parallel to the Bible.

Creation of Humankind

Genesis 1:26 and 2:5 have two modules: (1) creation of humankind followed by (2) absence of cultivation or the existence of barren land.

Hittite legends are silent on creation of man. They do mention though the mountains drying up which may be considered to have the same motif as barren earth (Hoffner 1990, 21-22).

Enuma Elish tells of the God Ea making mankind: “From (Qingu’s) blood (Ea) created mankind” (Joshua 2018, Enuma Elish VI.29-32). Berossus says: “When Bel saw that *the land was barren*” he formed men and beasts able to endure the air (Berossus n.d.). This is parallel to “there being no man to cultivate the ground” as said in the Bible.

The Vayu Purana says that Brahma created four sets of 1000 couples (Tagare 1987: 8:37-40). This is followed by, “for some reason those *people did not engage* in the path directed” (Tagare 1987, 10:1). We consider “not engaging in the path directed” to be a weak parallel to lack of cultivation assuming that cultivation was the path directed.

Man made from “dirty earth”

The Bible says that God formed Adam from the soil of the ground (Gen. 2:7). The Hebrew word for soil is “aphar”. It means “dust, dirt, ashes, dusty, debris, dirt-covered, scabs, grave” (88 times) as well as “soil, ground, earth, plaster and siege ramps” (22 times) (Net Bible Strong’s 06083). These two sets of meanings read together give the sense of “dirty earth.”

The Hittite legends mention “Dark Earth” (Hoffner 1990, 12). However, there is no association of this with the creation of man. Thus, we consider this motif to be a weak parallel.

The Sumeric texts are silent on such an event.

The Vayu Purana says that Brahma had three qualities—goodness, passion, and darkness (Monier-Williams 1987, 863). Brahma divided his body of darkness into two parts—woman and man (Tagare 1987: 10:6-8). We consider this creation from darkness to be parallel to the creation from “dirty earth” in the Bible.

Four Rivers

The Bible tells of God placing Adam in the Garden where one river parted into four rivers (Gen. 2:10).

The Hittite legends refer to Marassanta and Nakkiliya Rivers. The context is of the Storm God giving instruction to the rivers (Hoffner 1990, 22-23). The motif of rivers is present, however, only two rivers are mentioned hence we consider this to be a weak parallel.

The Enuma Elish too tells of the only two rivers: “From (Tiamat’s) two eyes (Marduk) let the Euphrates and Tigris flow” (Mark 2018, Enuma Elish V:54-55). Like the Hittite legends, only two rivers are mentioned hence we consider this to be a weak parallel.

The Vayu Purana says that Brahma lived where, “one sky-flowing river fell on four mountaintops... of Meru and began to flow dividing into four” (Tagare 1987, 34:46-96, 42:25-35). We consider this to be parallel to the Bible.

Creation of Woman

The Bible tells of God making woman from the rib of man (Gen. 2:21-22).

The Hittite legends and Enuma Elish are silent on the creation of woman. Atrahasis, however, tells of the womb-goddess Mami creating, “seven males and seven females” (Dalley 2008). Here the woman is not created from the body of the male, instead, both male and female are created from a third source. Thus, we consider this to be a weak parallel.

As mentioned above, the Vayu Purana says that Brahma divided his body of darkness into two parts—woman and man. This is followed by the statement that the woman married the man and the duo became the progenitors of mankind (Tagare 1987, 10:6-8, 11). We consider this splitting of the body to be parallel to Eve being created from Adam’s ribs.

Curse upon the serpent

The Bible tells of God cursing the serpent: “On your belly you will crawl and dust you will eat” (Gen. 3:14).

The Hittite legend tells of the Storm God killing the serpent and the gods (Hoffner 1990, 12). The motif of the serpent being in trouble is parallel to the Bible.

The Enuma Elish makes no mention of a curse on the serpent.

The Vayu Purana says that at one time Brahma saw an unpleasant creation made by him and his hairs got separated and took the form of serpents. Then he determined the place of their residence in, “the womb of the earth where rays of sun and moon did not reach” (Tagare 1987: 9:34-36). We consider this to be a weak parallel because there is no sense of curse in this narrative.

Curse upon the Woman

God cursed the woman to bring forth children in pain (Gen. 3:16).

The Hittite and Sumeric texts are silent on such a curse. The Vayu Purana says that previously women used to bear children only towards the end of their lives and they were prone to death. Then they began to have monthly periods (Tagare 1987: 8:43-44). The phrase “prone to death” indicates a

difficult physical situation and having monthly periods indicates more numbers of childbirth. We consider these to be parallel to bringing forth children in pain.

Tilling the Ground

The Bible says that Adam was sent to till the ground (Gen. 3:17-18, 23).

The Hittite legends say: “let the land prosper and thrive,” and also tells of the “wheat of irrigation” (Hoffner 1990, 11, 33). The motif of tillage is embedded here. Enuma Elish tells of Enbilulu, the great chosen one, “who provides cereal offerings, who keeps pasturage and watering in good condition... and brings grain into being” (Mark 2018, Enuma Elish VII:57-67). The Vayu Purana says that those people started cultivation by ploughing (Tagare 1987: 8:159). We consider all the three texts to be parallel to the Biblical description.

Clothing

The Bible says God made tunics of skin and clothed Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21).

The Hittite and Sumeric texts are silent on this point. The Vayu Purana says that the people began to obtain clothes from the trees which we consider to be parallel to the Bible (Tagare 1987: 8:96).

Mount Moriah

Ezek. 20:40 describes the Garden being located on God’s “holy mountain.”

The Hittite legends tell of the divine mountain Zaliyanu being “first in rank” (Hoffner 1990, 12). The motif of a sacred mountain is parallel to the Bible.

The Sumeric texts do not tell of such a mountain. Rather the narrative revolves around rivers and canals hence we consider it to be distinct.

The Vayu Purana says, Brahma—the creator—lives on one part of the top of the Meru Mountain (Tagare 1987: 35:46-96). We consider this to be parallel to the Bible.

We now summarize the parallels in texts in Table 4.

Table 4: Parallels in Texts

No	Biblical Description	Lake Van	Points	Qurnah	Points	Pushkar	Points
1	Elohim and Yahweh.	Mother Goddess Hannahanna and Strom God.	P _w	Primeval waters Apsu and Goddess Tiamat.	P _w	Brahman and Brahma	P
2	Creation of Heaven and Earth.	Heaven and dark earth.	P	Heavens and earth came to exist later.	P	No reference to heavens.	S
3	There was watery darkness.	Watery abyss.	P	Everything was darkness and water.	P	In the darkness everything was covered with waters.	P
4	Spirit was moving on waters.	-	S	-	S	[Brahma] kept roaming here and there [on the waters].	P
5	Appearance of Dry Ground.	Established House out of watery abyss.	P	Land coalesced later.	P	The Lord established [the earth] above the waters.	P
6	Separation of Day from the Night.	-	S	Bel created the sun and the moon.	P	Creation of moon and sun.	P

7	Creation of Humankind.	-	S	Ea made mankind from the blood of Qingu.	P	Brahma created four sets of 1000 couples.	P
8	No man to cultivate the ground.	Mountains dried up.	P	The land was barren.	P	People did not engage in the path directed.	P _w
9	God made man from dirty earth.	Dark Earth not related to the creation of man.	P _w	-	S	Brahma divided his body of darkness into woman and man.	P
10	Four Rivers.	Marassanta and Nakkiliya Rivers.	P _w	Tigris and Euphrates.	P _w	Four rivers.	P
11	Creation of woman from the body of man.	-	S	Womb-goddess created seven males and seven females.	P _w	Brahma divided his body it into man and woman.	P
12	Curse upon the serpent.	Storm god killed the serpent.	P	-	S	Serpent to reside where sun and moon did not reach.	P _w
13	Curse upon the woman.	-	S	-	S	Women began to have monthly periods.	P
14	Tilling the Ground.	Prosperity of land, wheat of irrigation.	P	Cereal offerings, pasturage and watering.	P	People started cultivation by ploughing.	P
15	Tunics of skin.	-	S	-	S	Obtained clothes from trees.	P
16	Adam lived at Mount Moriah.	Divine mountain Zaliyanu.	P	Rivers and canals, not mountains.	D	Brahma lived on Mount Meru.	P
17	Summary.	P=7, P _w =3, S=6, D=0; Net= (+)7 (+)1.5 = (+)8.5/16 or 53%.		P=7, P _w =3, S=5, D=1; Net= (+)7 (+)0.5 (-)1 = (+)7.5/16 or 47%.		P=13, P _w =2, S=1, D=0; Net= (+)13 (+) 1= 14/16 or 87%.	

Discussion

We have varying numbers of observations for the four parameters: Geography fourteen, Archaeology two, Names nine and Texts sixteen, Total forty-one.

One method of putting the numbers together is to give equal weight to each parameter irrespective of the number of observations therein. In this case, the fourteen observations in “geography” are given the same weight as the two observations in “archaeology.” The other method is to give equal importance to each observation, irrespective of the number of observations in a parameter. In this case the fourteen observations in “geography” are together given the weight of fourteen while the two observations in “archaeology” are given a weight of only two. We think both methods are justified; hence, we are given calculations by both the methods.

We have taken the percent figures from the last line from Tables 1 to Table 4 and put them together in the Table 5 below. In doing so we have given equal weight to each parameter irrespective of the numbers of observations therein.

Table 5: Equal Weight to Parameters, percent.

Sl. No.	Parameter	Lake Van	Qurnah	Pushkar
1	Geography	(-) 14	7	89
2	Archaeology	(-) 25	100	50
3	Names	44	56	61
4	Texts	53	47	87
5	Average	15	53	72

We get fifteen, fifty-three and seventy-two percent parallels for Lake Van, Qurnah, and Pushkar respectively on this method. The parallels in geography are starkly different: minus fourteen and plus seven percent at Lake Van and Qurnah respectively as compared to plus eighty nine percent at Pushkar.

Next, we have taken the numerator and denominator from the last line of each of the four summary Tables and put them together in Table 6 below. Then we have added the numerators and denominators separately and given these in the second-last row titled "Total Observations." This row gives us the numbers of observations that are parallel as a ratio of total numbers of observations. Then for easy comparison we have converted these figures into percent in the last row.

Table 6: Equal Weight to Observations: All Observations

Sl. No.	Parameter	Lake Van	Qurnah	Pushkar
1	Geography	-2/14	1/14	12.5/14
2	Archaeology	(-) 0.5/2	2/2	1/2
3	Names	4/9	5/9	5.5/9
4	Texts	8.5/16	7.5/16	14/16
5	Total Observations	10/41	15.5/41	33/41
6	Percent	24	38	80

We get twenty-four, thirty-eight, and eighty percent parallels for Lake Van, Qurnah, and Pushkar respectively.

Conclusion

We find much greater parallels at Pushkar irrespective of whether we give equal weight to the parameters or the observations. The parallels on the parameter of geography are starkly in favour of Pushkar. This is important because the efforts to identify the location of the Garden are majorly anchored on the geography of the four rivers. Thus, we conclude that a good case exists for the Garden being located at Pushkar.

Significance of this conclusion is that the Garden of Eden was not obliterated in the Flood, it is not a mythological but a real place, and has a physical existence in addition to being a spiritual symbol; and provides historicity to the narrative Eden and the Genesis.

The pathways of the transmission of Eden from India into the Biblical narrative needs separate study.

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