The Samaritan Pentateuch and Affiliated Texts: Literary Growth and Textual Criticism

Before I start, I would like to pay tribute to Garry Knoppers, in honor of whom an event devoted to his posthumously published volume is planned for next week. Garry contributed enormously to the research on the Samaritan sect and Pentateuch. I was introduced to him when he came to Bar Ilan University five years ago. He was genuinely interested in my research and asked me to send him my dissertation as soon as it was done. Unfortunately, by the time I completed it, Garry had passed away.

The Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) is a comprehensive Hebrew version of the Pentateuch written in the Samaritan script. The SP is the authoritative text of the Samaritan community and is in use to this day. Like the Masoretic Text (MT), the SP was preserved only in medieval manuscripts from the eleventh to fourteenth century CE. However, like the MT, the SP is an example of an ancient textual tradition that circulated in Israel in the Second Temple period.

In today’s presentation, I shall deal extensively with the Samaritan Pentateuch and the textual tradition it represents. First, I shall concentrate on the history of the research on the SP in past centuries, the turn this research took after the discovery of the Qumran scrolls, and the characterization and transmission of the text. Next, I shall discuss the textual proximity of the SP to pre-Samaritan scrolls, which I shall illustrate through an analysis of 4QpaleoExodm—also known as 4Q22—the longest preserved pre-Samaritan scroll. In doing so, I shall demonstrate the features it shares with the SP. Afterwards, I shall discuss the so-called “Samaritan layer” of the Samaritan Pentateuch, and, after presenting the new findings of my research on 4Q22, argue that this layer, if it exists at all, is thinner than commonly thought. Finally, I shall discuss the implications of these findings.

1 *SP: Research History, Textual Characterization and Transmission*

The SP did not come to the attention of scholars until the seventeenth century. In 1616, Pietro della Valle brought to Europe a manuscript of the Samaritan Pentateuch that he had purchased in Damascus. The text was subsequently printed in a polyglot edition in Paris and London. Until the nineteenth century, textual criticism of the Samaritan Pentateuch continued to be influenced by the theological approaches of the time. The work became a point of contention between Catholics, who upheld the value of the LXX and SP against the MT, and Protestants, who upheld the value of the MT.

A significant landmark in the study of the SP, free of theological influence, was that of Guilielmus Gesenius, an early nineteenth-century scholar who sorted the textual variants between MT and SP into eight categories and concluded that most of the Samaritan ones were secondary. He claimed that the SP preserved preferable readings in only six out of about six thousand documented cases, and also reflected the textual tradition of LXX. Gesenius' study exerted an influence on later scholars, who came to regard the SP as inferior to MT in so far as textual criticism was concerned.

Nonetheless, Abraham Geiger challenged Gesenius' claim. In an 1857 study, Geiger emphasized that the SP offered valuable testimony of a popular ancient tradition that had escaped Rabbinic editing. In the early twentieth century, Paul Kahle lent his support to this view, claiming that the SP preserved ancient versions reflected in both LXX and non-scriptural compositions such as the Book of Jubilees and Enoch. Thanks to the discovery of the Qumran scrolls, Geiger and Kahle's claim about the ancient origin of the SP eventually proved correct.

The discovery of the Qumran scrolls in the mid-twentieth century changed scholar’s view of the ST. Textual analysis of the Pentateuchal scrolls revealed that a group of texts offer evidence of major expansions to and duplications in the SP. The texts within this group are thus as the pre-Samaritan scrolls. They have led to a broad consensus that the SP originated in an ancient Jewish expansionist textual tradition that circulated in Judea in the late Second Temple period. When establishing their sectarian authoritative text, the Samaritans adopted this textual tradition for their Pentateuch. This discovery led to the recognition of the SP’s importance to the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible and thus a renewed scholarly interest in it.

The pre-Samaritan tradition was transmitted by scribes who interpolated major expansions that duplicated material already present in the Pentateuch into the text.

These expansions appear primarily in recurring Pentateuchal narratives and are meant to improve their consistency. Previous scholars referred to them simply as harmonizations. However, as Michael Segal and others have suggested, these expansions do not harmonize with the parallel narratives. On the contrary, the contradictions that occur side by side in the two distinct accounts tend to heighten the tension between them. The purpose of these expansions was to increase the internal consistency of the Pentateuch, ensuring that those accounts that appeared later in the text referred to events covered earlier in the text. Moreover, several major expansions appear in the book of Exodus in the plagues narrative. These arose from a formal need to perfect the act of divine speech and to add detail to the divine command to Moses to speak to Pharaoh as well as to the fulfillment of this command.

The socio-historical background of the formation of the pre-Samaritan tradition has been widely discussed among scholars. The SP was deemed a popular or vulgar text practically from the moment that it aroused scholarly attention. This view dominated for many years. Moshe Greenberg, for instance, argued that the Samaritan Pentateuch represented a popular trend that was later rejected by the academic proto-Masoretic text. This idea informs to some degree the earlier works of Kahle and Shemaryahu Talmon, as well as those of Emanuel Tov. However, in a paper of 2013, Jonathan Ben-Dov characterized the scribal activity of the pre-Samaritan tradition as an academic endeavor and made a strong argument that the duplications in the pre-Samaritan tradition were the fruit of trained scholars motivated to bring the text to perfection. Ben-Dov points to similar literary techniques evident in contemporary Hellenistic literature, chiefly those used by the Alexandrian scholars of Homer.

In a 1976 study, James Purvis dated the Samaritan Pentateuch to the second century BCE. Purvis supported his claim with a paleographic discussion of the development of the Samaritan script, the orthography of the SP, and its textual tradition. Although much time has elapsed since Purvis’ study, his claim is still accepted by numerous scholars, including Richard Coggins, Emanuel Tov, Robert Anderson and Terry Giles, Reinhard Pummer, and Sidnie White Crawford.

Like the MT, the SP has been transmitted via two parallel paths: textual and oral tradition. But while the literary tradition was incorporated into the medieval manuscripts of the MT through the insertion of punctuation, cantillation, and *Qere* notes, a Samaritan reading tradition was not documented until the last century, when Zeev Ben-Hayyim published a full transcript of the Samaritan reading tradition, accompanied by a comprehensive grammar of Samaritan Hebrew. Ben-Hayyim also provided a grammatical interpretation of sections of the Pentateuch based on this reading tradition. In his view, the Samaritan reading tradition preserves ancient readings and reflects Hebrew dialects used in the late Second Temple period. Beh-Hayyim’s hypothesis runs counter to the claim of a contemporary scholar, Rudolph Machuch, who argues that the reading tradition came late and was influenced by the Arabic adopted by the Samaritans in the eleventh century. Machuch believes that the the primary aim of the Samaritan reading tradition was to resolve textual difficulties. However, Ben-Hayyim’s work, which highlights the fundamental role of the reading tradition in the study of the SP, has been recognized and accepted by leading scholars, such as Stefan Schorch, Moshe Florentin, and Noam Mizrahi.

*2 The pre-Samaritan Tradition and SP: 4Q22 and SP-Exod*

Now, I shall illustrate the textual proximity of the pre-Samaritan tradition to the SP through a discussion of SP-Exod and 4Q22. I will begin by describing the major features of SP-Exod, then show the elements it has in common with 4Q22.

Unlike MT and LXX, SP-Exod includes seventeen major expansions (slide). Of these, ten appear in the plagues narrative. As stated, these expansions add detail to both the divine command to speak to Pharaoh and the fulfillment of this order. (slide) Thus, in the case when a divine command, such as לך אל פרעה or בוא אל פרעה, is given to Moses, the MT-Exod does not actually describe Moses addressing Pharaoh. The pre-Samaritan tradition corrected this problem by reproducing—and adapting—text drawn from divine commands that appear in previous verses. Here, in the slide, we can see an occurrence of this in the first plague in SP-Exod 7. (slide) Conversely, there are instances in MT-Exod in which Moses speaks to Pharaoh even though the divine command is absent. The pre-Samaritan tradition remedied this by copying the message to Pharaoh in the preceding verses and shaping them into divine commands, as we can see in the slide.

(slide) Additional major expansions that deal with the organization of the judiciary appear in Chapter 18 of the SP-Exod, while Chapter 20 describes the theophany at Sinai, Chapter 27 details the creation of priestly vestments, and Chapter 32 covers the episode of the golden calf. In each of these, a certain quantity of the text in Exodus has been copied from parallel accounts in Deuteronomy.

Here I will use SP-Exod 18 as a representative example of these expansions (slide). According to this chapter’s account of the organization of the judiciary, the reason for the delegation by Moses of some responsibility in the matter of hearing the people’s problems is Jethro’s counsel. However, in the parallel account in Deut 1:9–18, Moses does not mention Jethro at all. The reason behind the need to delegate responsibility in Deut 1 is directly related to the Lord’s fulfillment of his promise to increase the number of people. Hence, it became an increasingly difficult task for Moses to undertake all aspects of leadership, both judiciary and military, by himself. Driven by the need to illuminate the earlier by the later story, SP-Exod 18 combines Jethro’s counsel with the reason mentioned by Moses in Deut 1. Thus, SP-Exod 18 is a composed text, in which Moses speaks to the people and confesses his inability to deal with their problems on his own—as described in Deuteronomy—after receiving Jethro's counsel. Moreover, the instructions to the judges in Deut 1 are also integrated into the text of SP-Exod 18.

In addition to the major expansions typical to the SP tradition, there are two cases of rearrangements or transpositions in SP-Exod: in the instructions for the incense altar, and the installation of the high priest (slide). We can see in the slide that the MT and LXX, on the one hand, and the SP, on the other, arrange these passages in different places.

4Q22 attests to portions of Exod 6:25–36:24. It is written in a neat and formal paleo-Hebrew script. 4Q22 has been variously dated from the mid-fifth century to the first century BCE, though recently, consensus has shifted towards the later date. The material reconstruction of the scroll proposed in the official edition by Patrick Skehan, Eugene Ulrich, and Judith Sanderson indicates that the preserved text occupied fifty-five consecutive columns in the original scroll, and that no fragments of two of these columns (XIV; XLIII) have survived.

Of the seventeen major expansions in the SP-Exod, eight are documented in 4Q22 (slide). Four additional ones—all in the plagues narrative—may be documented in the scroll. In these cases, we may not be able to determine whether or not the preserved text is an expansion since the expansions themselves reproduce nearly identical text from previous or subsequent verses. However, as the expansions of the plagues narrative exhibit a consistent and systematic character, it is highly unlikely that a scroll that includes expansions on several plagues would exclude them elsewhere in the narrative. Hence, as 4Q22 clearly attests to some expansions in the plagues narrative, we may conclude that the remaining ones were included in the scroll as well. In the remaining five cases, the text is not preserved in 4Q22.

4Q22 shares with SP the arrangement of the instructions for the incense altar in Chapter 26. Like the MT, however, it does not include the instructions for the installation of the high priest after Ex 29:21. Yet because verses 28–29 have not been preserved in 4Q22, we cannot ascertain whether these instructions originally appeared at this point of the scroll’s text.

In her detailed analysis of 4Q22, published in 1986, Judith Sanderson proposes that all the major expansions in SP-Exod were originally included in the scroll save the one on the tenth commandment to build an altar on Mount Gerizim in Exod 20.

SP-Exod 20 contains three major expansions (slide):

(1) The tenth commandment regarding the altar on Mount Gerizim, drawn from Deut 11 and 27 (Exod 20:13b).

(2) The people’s request that Moses act as mediator at Sinai, drawn from Deut 5 (Exod 20:15).

(3) God’s response to the people’s request, also drawn from Deut 5 (Exod 20:17b).

The preserved fragments of 4Q22 attest to the second expansion, while the first and third expansions are not preserved.

In the official edition, Skehan, Ulrich, and Sanderson elaborate on Sanderson’s suggestion by drawing on material and textual evidence in 4Q22. Based on the extant remains of Exod 20, the number of lines per column, and the fragments securely placed in the reconstructed columns, they conclude that the scroll agrees neither with MT-like nor SP-like texts. The lacuna between the fragments attesting to Exod 20 and fragments in previous and subsequent columns is too large to include an MT-like text, but too short to include an SP-like text. Since the scroll speaks of the people’s request, it would be quite natural for it to include God’s response so as to complete the story. Such an assumption does not leave room for the tenth commandment in 4Q22. The editors thus suggest that it was not originally included there.

3 *The so-called “Samaritan” Layer*

The editors’ conclusion regarding the absence of the tenth commandment in 4Q22 was an important milestone in the formulation of the model of the textual development of the SP. It had a profound impact on scholars, such as Garry Knoppers, Magnar Kartveit, Tov, and Crawford, who pointed to the so-called “Samaritan layer” in SP. This layer is a thin one, inserted by the Samaritan scribes due to ideological changes. When establishing their authoritative text, the Samaritans adopted the pre-Samaritan tradition and aligned it with the sect’s beliefs by inserting sectarian readings.

The Samaritan layer is concerned with the cultic centralization of Mount Gerizim (slide). The two prominent changes associated with this layer are the tenth commandment and the use of the perfect form בחר rather than the imperfect יבחר in the cult formula central to MT-Deut: המקום אשר יבחר ה, “the place where the Lord will choose.” As in the case of the tenth commandment, so here, the reading המקום אשר בחר ה is not documented in the DSS. The absence of so-called “sectarian” readings in the pre-Samaritan scrolls, on the one hand, and their compatibility with the ideology of the sect, on the other, has led to the distinction between the two stages in the textual development of the SP.

Recent years, however, have seen growing skepticism about the reliability of the distinction between the pre-Samaritan and Samaritan layers. Studies by Adrian Schenker, Schorch, and Edmon Gallhager emphasize that the reading בחר may not be a sectarian one. It is also documented in MT-Neh 1:9, which states: והביאותים אל המקום אשר בחרתי לשכן את שמי שם, “I will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.” Moreover, Schenker argues that the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX includes a past-tense verb in the Deuteronomic formula that corresponds to the perfect form בחר of the SP.

The designation of the tenth commandment as a purely ideological Samaritan change has also been questioned. Molly Zahn, for example, emphasizes that this section shows very close connections with the hermeneutical perspective seen in further pre-Samaritan expansions. Following Knoppers, Zahn demonstrates the textual proximity of the materials in Deut 11 and 27, which form the tenth commandment and the last two verses of Exod 20 that deal with an altar law (slide). Zahn convincingly demonstrates that both sections share content and linguistic elements (slide). Nonetheless, the altar law does not provide a specific location for the altar and probably refers to altars in general. The insertion of the tenth commandment before it clarifies that the commandment refers to one specific altar that, according to Deut 27, should be built on Mount Gerizim. (I’ll not elaborate now on the divergence between the MT and the SP with regard to the place of the altar in Deut 27:4. On both internal and external grounds, the Samaritan reading “Mount Gerizim” is the most likely to be the original one, not the Massoretic “Mount Ebal.”)

Schorch, in turn, demonstrates in detail the similarity of the scribal techniques used in the tenth commandment and the third expansion in Chapter 20, which deals with God’s response and the role of the prophet. Both incorporate materials from different chapters in Deuteronomy into a composed text to create an explicit text in the Book of Exodus. Schorch concludes that the tenth commandment and God’s response were penned by the same scribal circles.

The attribution of the tenth commandment to the pre-Samaritan stage raises the question of its absence from 4Q22. As stated, the scroll reflects the long text type of the book of Exodus. Therefore, if the tenth commandment belongs to the pre-Samaritan rather than the Samaritan layer, we would expect it to be included in the scroll.

Schorch does, in fact, deal with this issue. He re-estimates the lacuna between the extant fragments in the relevant portion in the scroll and concludes that there is room for the tenth commandment in 4Q22. Schorch’s conclusion is the opposite of that of the editors mentioned above. In order to check the contradicting claims, I conducted a material and textual reconstruction of the relevant columns in 4Q22 using innovative digital tools that simulate the condition of these columns before the scroll’s deterioration. The simulation clearly and transparently displays the data and allows us to arrive at a decisive conclusion.

My research on 4Q22 supports the view that the tenth commandment to build an altar on Mount Gerizim is not a sectarian change. As I show below, it was probably included in 4Q22 and should therefore not be discarded from the pre-Samaritan layer. In what follows, I shall describe the assumptions and principles underlying the reconstruction.

(1) The proposed reconstruction extends from column XVIII to column XXII (slide), which corresponds to Exod 17:16-21:6. Although Chapter 20, attesting to the Decalogue, is expected to appear only in columns XXI-XXII, the discussion begins with the closest securely located fragments. Columns XVIII and XXII include fragments that show traces of bottom margins and that serve as anchors for the reconstruction of the poorly preserved text between them.

(2) The official edition includes 447 unidentified fragments. The proposed reconstruction includes several fragments that were successfully identified by Nathan Jastram and Drew Longacre after the completion of the official edition. I did not accept all the new identifications suggested by them—only those that seemed certain.

(3) (slide) Column XVIII can be confidently reconstructed as it consists of fragments that preserve both top and intercolumnar margins, in addition to bottom margins. It also includes enough extant fragments to inspire confidence in its contents and arrangement. The complete column attests to 33 lines, which is in line with other columns in the scroll.

(4) (slide) Columns XIX and XX preserve fragments that also inspire some confidence in their textual reconstruction. Fragments associated with column XIX preserve the top and intercolumnar margin and are securely located. In addition, the missing text between the fragments in these columns is relatively stable. No major expansions, omissions or transpositions are documented across the textual traditions. We can therefore securely estimate the width of the columns by reconstructing the missing text between the fragmentary lines.

(5) (slide) The text of Exod 20 in the scroll is spread over columns XXI and XXII, which are poorly preserved. Column XXI preserves only three fragments. All of them attest to the pre-Samaritan expansion of Deut 5, which details the people’s request from Moses (slide). Column XXII only includes two preserved fragments, both attest to Exod 21:5–6. Due to the poor preservation of these columns, their reconstruction is less certain. All the same, the securely placed fragments in the previous columns as well as the two fragments at the bottom of column XXII do frame the expected place where Exod 20 once appeared in these columns.

The reconstruction of the missing text between the extant fragments thus reveals that there is room for all three major expansions of SP-Exod 20 in the original scroll. (slide) In the slide before us, the three major expansions are colored in red. We can clearly see that the lacuna between the preserved fragments fits perfectly with the amount of long text-type in Exod 20, including all three expansions. The fact that the tenth commandment involves a significant quantity of text grants a high degree of certainty to the conclusion that there is room for it in the original scroll.

To be clear, I do not intend to claim that the proposed textual reconstruction fully reflects the original layout of the scroll. Slight changes are inevitable due to different techniques of paragraph division, orthography, and possibly minor textual variants. A further consideration that may affect the reconstruction’s accuracy is the arrangement of the Decalogue, which is unknown because no fragment of 4Q22 preserves it. I therefore inserted intervals between the commandments sporadically, as did the scribe of 4QDeutn, an additional Dead Sea scroll that preserves the Decalogue. However, even if the layout of the original text was quite different, that would not change the conclusion regarding the tenth commandment based on its scope.

Moreover, the reconstruction of the missing text between the preserved fragments is based on the text of the Samaritan Pentateuch. However, the transmission of scriptural texts in the Second Temple period was characterized by ongoing revisions and expansions. Scribes were often active partners in the textual development of the text, repeatedly reshaping and rewriting it. Therefore 4Q22 may have included the expansionist text type of Exod 20, in a different form than that represented in the SP. The fluidity of this chapter is evident in the further interpolations of the section that describes Moses acting as a mediator at the theophany on Sinai in 4Q158 and 4Q175.

4Q158 was firstly published as a non-scriptural scroll by John Allegro. Despite the long history of its analysis and classification, it has been widely accepted as a scriptural text by various scholars, such as Segal, Tov, Crawford, and Popović. Although this scroll contains long sections of unaltered scriptural material, its style and language are not identical to those of the scriptural text. Segal therefore stresses that it lies at the boundary between scriptural and para-scriptural compositions.

4Q158 is based on a pre-Samaritan version of the Pentateuch. (slide) Fragments 6–8 display an improved text—from both a stylistic and logical point of view—of the theophany on Sinai. 4Q158 fragments 6–8 are unique in adding the words את קול דברי אמור להמה before God’s declaration about the prophet and the account of how the divine command to send the people to their tents was fulfilled. These additions seem to create smoother transitions within the text and to respond to interpretive difficulties.

(slide) 4Q175 consists of a collection of quotes from the HB arranged in a single column divided into paragraphs and has been the subject of endless discussion. The first section of 4Q175 includes a citation of the pre-Samaritan version of Exod 20:21, which is a composite text of materials drawn from Deut 5:28–29 and 18:18–19. Nonetheless, the two successive verses in Deuteronomy 18 that appear in SP are missing from 4Q175. These verses deal with the distinction between true and false prophecy.

In view of the dynamic process that gave rise to these expansions, 4Q22 included the expanded text of Exod 20 in a quite different form from that documented in the SP. This fact may slightly affect the reconstruction. Nonetheless, the reconstruction offers a good idea of the missing text between the extant fragments due to the securely placed fragments that serve as anchors for the reconstruction. This, along with a relatively large amount of text in each expansion, allows for a good degree of certainty with regards to the conclusion that 4Q22 contains room for the tenth commandment.

4 *Implications*

The material and textual reconstruction of the five columns of 4Q22 demonstrate that 4Q22 probably included a text of the Decalogue that contained a commandment to build an altar on Mount Gerizim. This conclusion is in line with recent studies proposing that the tenth commandment was penned by the same scribes who interpolated pre-Samaritan traditions since it points to similar literary and hermeneutical techniques.

These findings carry importance that far outweighs the discussion of 4Q22. They shed new light on both the textual development of the Samaritan Pentateuch and the fluidity and flexibility of Jewish textual traditions in the late Second Temple period.

With regards to the Samaritan Pentateuch, this study questions the existence of a “Samaritan” layer. As the tenth commandment—the most typical ideological change—seems to be Jewish, we may conclude that the Samaritans adopted the Jewish expansionist tradition without interpolating any significant changes. The development of the SP’s text is here claimed to be the opposite of what has been widely accepted thus far: the insertion of the tenth commandment preceded the adoption of the pre-Samaritan tradition by Samaritans.

The material from Deuteronomy 11 and 27 that comprise the tenth commandment can be associated with an ancient textual tradition that depicts Shechem and its surroundings as a center of worship. A set of texts in the Hexateuch are associated with this tradition. In Genesis 12, Shechem is the first place settled by Abraham and the site of an altar that he build to the Lord. In Gen 33: 18–20, Jacob similarly erects an altar in Shechem. Deut 11:26–30 mentions the commandment about the blessing and cursing ceremony on Mounts Gerizim and Ebal. The MT and SP-Deut 27, which are duplicated in the tenth commandment, mention Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, respectively, as places where an altar to the Lord was to be built. Josh 8:30–35 describes the ceremony of cursing and blessing and the construction of the altar on Mount Ebal. Finally, Josh 24 accounts for the covenant ceremony that refers to the oak in Shechem as a part of a sacred site.

Martin Noth and Gerhard von Rad posited that the various passages describing Shechem as a center of worship originated in the northern kingdom before its downfall. They claimed that these passages reflect a very early stage in Israelite history, during which Shechem served as the site of the annual covenant ceremony of the twelve tribes. This view was commonly accepted in the middle of the last century. However, Nadav Na’aman and Christofer Nihan have recently suggested that the Shechemist tradition was a late, post-exilic one. Mark Brett, in turn, has demonstrated that the Hexateuchal horizon extended from Genesis to Joshua and was edited according to a priestly perspective related to the defense of northern Yahwism.

Whatever the case, if indeed the Decalogue in the pre-Samaritan tradition incorporated the Shechemist tradition, it may explain why this specific tradition was adopted by the Samaritans.

My findings match and enrich our knowledge of the textual plurality and fluidity of scriptural texts in the late Second Temple period in general, and the Decalogue in particular. The Decalogue, which lay at the core of the Jewish legal tradition in antiquity, circulated in various versions in the late Second Temple period. It is documented in two versions in the MT, in Exod 20 and Deut 5, as well as in a different version in LXX. I have shown that an yet another version of the Decalogue apparently existed in the pre-Samaritan tradition. We may therefore conclude that a growing number of Jewish traditions developed, reshaped, and rewrote the text of the Decalogue. Stated differently, the Decalogue was a fluid text that was repeatedly changed throughout the course of its transmission.

Finally, a methodological note. The existence of the “Samaritan” layer in the Samaritan Pentateuch was enormously influenced by the claim made by the editors of 4Q22 that it did not include the so-called “Samaritan” tenth commandment. According to my findings, this claim is incorrect. This study illustrates the need to examine the valuable efforts of the original editors of the scroll, a work that has to be periodically updated thanks to the advanced digital images and tools available to us today.