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Jews and Samaritans in Joshua 24

This article collects the evidence for a post-Priestly dating of Joshua 24 in the fifth century BCE and interprets the specific setting and concept of this text in the context of the contemporaneous rivalries and interactions between Jews and Samaritans. Joshua 24 opts for a theocratic constitution for all Israel. The choice of Shechem as the location for this scene shows that the North is not the exclusive, but a very prominent addressee of Joshua 24.

Keywords: Joshua 24, Samaritans, Shechem, Hexateuch, Priestly Document

The time and setting of the ceremony at Shechem in Joshua 24 is placed sometime during the 11th century B.C.E.; that is its narrated setting in the biblical story. No Jews or Samaritans existed at that time. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to ask about “Jews and Samaritans in Joshua 24,” when keeping in mind the needed restraints. Asking this question does not refer to the world in the narrative of Joshua 24, but rather to the world of the narrators behind Joshua 24.

A distinction between biblical and historical Israel – or, put differently, between the world in the narrative and the world behind the narrative – belongs to the most important tools of biblical criticism.¹ The approach of this paper to Joshua 24 pertains not to its biblically evoked scenery, but to the way this scenery resonates with the alleged historical background of its authors. As will become clear later on, Joshua 24 was authored in a period when Jews and Samaritans existed side by side in the Levant. On this level, it is possible to ask how Jews and Samaritans are portrayed in Joshua 24.

But how are we to determine the historical background of Joshua 24?² The text is an extraordinarily high-profile one in biblical studies that has

1 Cf., e.g., R. G. Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* (trans. J. Bowden; London: T&T Clark, 2005); C. Levin, *The Old Testament: A Brief Introduction* (trans. M. Kohl; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); idem, *Historical and Biblical Israel* (trans. P. M. Kurtz; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); K. Schmid, *The Old Testament: A Literary History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).

2 For the following considerations see also K. Schmid, “Die Samaritaner und die Judäer: Die biblische Diskussion um ihr Verhältnis in Josua 24,” in *Die Samaritaner und die*

been treated by multiple monographs and addressed even more frequently in articles and essays.³ There is a correspondence between scholars' intense discussion of this chapter and the diversity of opinion about its literary-historical location and the ability to evaluate it historically.

The prominent narrative location of Joshua 24 at the conclusion of the conquest or, even more, at the conclusion of the hexateuchal salvation history (whose summary is in Josh 24:2–13), has always played an important role in the literary-historical evaluation of the chapter. The classic pentateuchal model of the 19th century understood Joshua 24 as the conclusion of "E."⁴ Those who disputed the existence of "E," whether in the book of Joshua specifically or in general, assigned Joshua 24 to "J"⁵ as its concluding text.

Bibel: Historische und literarische Wechselwirkungen zwischen biblischen und samaritanischen Traditionen / The Samaritans and the Bible: Historical and Literary Interactions between Biblical and Samaritan Traditions (ed. J. Frey et al.; Studia Judaica / Studia Samaritana 7; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 21–49.

- 3 Cf., e. g., G. Schmitt, *Der Landtag von Sichem* (AzTh I/15; Leipzig: EVA, 1964); H. Mölle, *Der sogenannte Landtag zu Sichem* (FB 42; Würzburg: Echter, 1980); W. T. Koopmans, *Joshua 24 as Poetic Narrative* (JSOTSup 93; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990); M. Anbar, *Josué et l'Alliance de Sichem (Josué 24:1–28)* (BET 25; Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1992); E. Noort, "Zu Stand und Perspektiven: Der Glaube Israels zwischen Religionsgeschichte und Theologie: Der Fall Josua 24," in *Perspectives in the Study of the Old Testament and Early Judaism* (ed. F. García Martínez and E. Noort; VTSup 73; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 82–108; R. G. Kratz, "Der vor- und der nachpriesterschriftliche Hexateuch," in *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (ed. J. C. Gertz et al.; BZAW 215; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 295–323; R. Müller, *Königtum und Gottesherrschaft: Untersuchungen zur alttestamentlichen Monarchiekritik* (FAT II/3; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 217–236; M. Popovič, "Conquest of the Land, Loss of the Land: Where Does Joshua 24 Belong?," in *The Land of Israel in Bible, History, and Theology: Studies in Honour of Ed Noort* (ed. J. van Ruiten and C. J. de Vos; VTSup 124; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 87–98; C. Frevel, "Die Wiederkehr der Hexateuchperspektive. Eine Herausforderung für die These vom deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk," in *Das deuteronomistische Geschichtswerk* (ed. H.-J. Stipp; ÖBS 39; Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2011), 13–53. See also T. Römer, "Das doppelte Ende des Josuabuches: Einige Anmerkungen zur aktuellen Diskussion um 'deuteronomistisches Geschichtswerk' und 'Hexateuch,'" ZAW 118 (2006): 523–548, 535 n. 39.
- 4 E. g., C. Steuernagel, *Das Buch Josua* (2nd ed.; GHK I,3/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1923), 297–298; H. Holzinger, *Das Buch Josua* (KHC VI; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1901), 95; J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (3rd ed.; Berlin: Reimer, 1899), 133; R. Smend Sr., *Die Erzählung des Hexateuch auf ihre Quellen untersucht* (Berlin: Reimer, 1912), 334–339; Schmitt, *Landtag*, 30; see further the presentation of scholarship in Koopmans, *Joshua 24*, 105–106. The linguistic indicators in Joshua 24 that were used for the assignment to "E" are also compiled in Koopmans, *Joshua 24*, 106–107 (cf. Schmitt, *Landtag*, 30).
- 5 W. Rudolph, *Der "Elohists" von Exodus bis Josua* (BZAW 68; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1938), 244–252. This thesis was revived by John Van Seters for his "J" ("Joshua 24 and the Problem of Tradition in the Old Testament," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of Gösta W. Ahlström* [JSOTSup 31; eds.

It was also popular to explain Joshua 24 as a mix of these two sources, thereby attributing it to “JE.”⁶ In other words, Joshua 24 could apparently be assigned to nearly *any* source, so it comes as no surprise that these proposals remained unconvincing.

The traditional assessment of Joshua 24 within the matrix of the documentary hypothesis completely changed in the wake of Martin Noth’s *Überlieferungsgeschichtlichen Studien*, published in 1943,⁷ when his thesis of a Deuteronomistic History from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings began to prevail.⁸ The upshot was that the texts in Joshua (and of course Judges through Kings as well) were to be explained without reference to pentateuchal sources.⁹ However, the question of Joshua 24’s literary-historical location became no easier. Within the Deuteronomistic History hypothesis, the problem of the relationship between the two farewell speeches in Joshua 23 and Joshua 24 moved to the forefront. If, as generally accepted, Joshua 23 was “Deuteronomistic” and Joshua 24 no longer had anything to do with “J” or “E,” then how was one to classify the latter chapter? Noth himself was puzzled, especially after being convinced in his *Geschichte Israels* or *History of Israel* from 1950 that one could find rather ancient traditional material on the 12-tribe amphictyony. He changed his mind multiple times about Joshua 24,¹⁰ without ever reaching a convincing solution.

Noth’s uncertainty on Joshua 24 was preserved in the scholarship after him. With its claim that Joshua 24 contains material about the so-called Diet

W.B. Barrick and J.R. Spencer; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984], 139–158; idem, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983], 336–337), who, however, shares little more with Rudolph’s “Yahwist” than the name.

6 Noth still holds to this in idem, *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930), 67, cf. 133–140. See further the presentation by Koopmans, *Joshua* 24, 107–108, who also presents the traditional reasons for source criticism, 108–109.

7 M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtlichen Studien* (Stuttgart: Niemeyer, 1943); or for the English translation, see *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTS 15; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981).

8 Cf. C. Frevel, “Deuteronomistisches Geschichtswerk oder Geschichtswerke? Die These Martin Noths zwischen Tetrateuch, Hexateuch und Enneateuch,” in *Martin Noth – aus der Sicht heutiger Forschung* (ed. U. Rütterswörden; BTSt 58; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2004), 60–95; C. Levin, “Nach siebzig Jahren: Martin Noths Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien heute,” *ZAW* 125 (2013): 72–92.

9 Cf. Schmitt, *Landtag*, 26; L. Perliß, *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament* (WMANT 36; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969); J.P. Floß, *Jahwe dienen – Göttern dienen: Terminologische, literarische und semantische Untersuchung einer theologischen Aussage zum Gottesverhältnis im Alten Testament* (BBB 45; Köln: Peter Hanstein, 1975), 368–370; V. Fritz, *Das Buch Josua* (HAT I/7; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 237.

10 Cf. M. Noth, *Das Buch Josua* (HAT I/7; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1938), 101 (= [2nd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1953], 139); idem, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, 9 n. 1.

of Shechem (“Landtag zu Sichem”) or the origin of the amphictyony,¹¹ the classical solution receded into the background, though the spectrum of proposed dates for Joshua 24 remained extremely broad in scholarship for the remainder of 20th-century. The chapter was still positioned by some in the period of the monarchy.¹² Following Lothar Peritt’s groundbreaking work on covenant theology in the Old Testament, others presumed that Joshua 24 arose from Deuteronomism.¹³ In recent scholarship, however, the number of voices supporting the appraisal that it is a postexilic text has increased.¹⁴ But the confusing polyphony of scholarly opinions should not be overestimated.

Current scholarship on Joshua 24 has shown with a degree of probability bordering on certainty that this text neither preserves historically reliable memories of the time it narrates nor belongs to the pre-exilic period in terms of its literary history. This conclusion is impaired by the uncertainty and controversy surrounding composition-critical procedures in Joshua 24,¹⁵ but one can assume with confidence that either the entire text or at least essential portions of it stem from the postexilic period. In light of the

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- 11 See M. Noth, *Geschichte Israels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950), 89–132; Schmitt, *Landtag*; H. Ringgren, “Der Landtag in Sichem,” in *Nachdenken über Israel, Bibel und Theologie: Festschrift für Klaus-Dietrich Schunck* (ed. H. M. Niemann et al.; BEAT 37; Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1994), 89–91.
- 12 D. S. Sperling, “Joshua 24 Re-Examined,” *HUCA* 58 (1987): 119–136. Sperling suggests the northern kingdom, perhaps under Jeroboam II.
- 13 Peritt, *Bundestheologie*. Regarding Peritt’s argument, see E. Blum, “Der kompositionelle Knoten am Übergang von Josua zu Richter: Ein Entflechtungsvorschlag,” in *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic Literature: Festschrift für C. H. W. Brekelmans* (ed. M. Vervenne and J. Lust; BETL 133; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 181–212, here 197–198; S. Kreuzer, *Die Frühgeschichte Israels in Bekenntnis und Verkündigung des Alten Testaments* (BZAW 178; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 208–213 (on him as well, see Blum, “Knoten,” 201 n. 85).
- 14 J. L’Hour, “L’alliance de Sichem,” *RB* 69 (1962): 5–36, 161–184, 350–368; A. D. H. Mayes, *The Story of Israel between Settlement and Exile: A Redactional Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 51; Anbar, *Josué*; T. Römer, *Israels Väter: Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der deuteronomistischen Tradition* (OBO 99; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1990), 325–326; R. Müller, *Königtum und Gottesherrschaft: Untersuchungen zur alttestamentlichen Monarchiekritik* (FAT II/3; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); U. Becker, “Endredaktionelle Kontextvernetzungen des Josua-Buches,” in *Die deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerke. Redaktions- und religionsgeschichtliche Perspektiven zur “Deuteronomismus”-Diskussion in Tora und Vorderen Propheten* (ed. M. Witte et al.; BZAW 365; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 139–161; M. Popović, “Conquest of the Land, Loss of the Land: Where Does Joshua 24 Belong?,” in *The Land of Israel in Bible, History, and Theology: Studies in Honour of Ed Noort* (ed. J. van Ruiten and C. J. de Vos; VTSup 124; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 87–98; E. A. Knauf, *Das Buch Josua* (ZBK 6; Zürich, 2008), 191–199.
- 15 Cf. on this the discussion in Römer, “Ende”; C. H. Gibling, “Structural Patterns in Jos 24,1–25,” *CBQ* (1964): 50–69; see Römer, *Israels Väter*, 540 n. 89.

diffuse state of scholarship, this apparently bold position can be substantiated as follows.

Of primary importance is the literary horizon of Joshua 24. Verses 2–4 name the triad of the patriarchs, and vv. 19–20 refer to Israel’s apostasy. Joshua 24 accordingly seems to look back to Genesis and forward to the book of Kings – a tremendously broad literary horizon that spans the first nine books of the Hebrew Bible.

Especially striking is the note in Josh 24:32 on the burial of Joseph’s bones, which concludes a narrative thread beginning in Gen 50:25 and found again in Exod 13:19.¹⁶ The parallelism between Joseph and Joshua in the 110 years of their lives needs also to be mentioned here. With regard to the narrative setting of Joshua 24 at Shechem, one can also suppose that a reference back to Gen 12:6, 8 is present – namely, Abraham’s construction of an altar in Shechem.¹⁷ The salvation history ends where it first began.

If one follows mainstream European scholarship on the Pentateuch – or maybe the Hexateuch, where the assumption is that this hexateuchal thread from the patriarchs to the conquest belongs to the end rather than to the beginning of the narrative books’ literary history¹⁸ – then the horizon of Joshua 24 speaks decidedly against an early date.

This position is further substantiated by some tradition-historical and redaction-historical observations. In terms of theological history, the main concern of the chapter – namely, the call to serve YHWH and to renounce other gods – can hardly be older than the first commandment of the Decalogue, which itself presupposes not only the Shema Israel, traditionally dated to the Josianic period, but also the literary and functional core of Deuteronomy.¹⁹

16 On this cf. M. Witte, “Die Gebeine Josefs,” in *Auf dem Weg zur Endgestalt von Genesis bis II Regum*: Festschrift für Hans-Christoph Schmitt zum 65. Geburtstag (ed. M. Beck and U. Schorn; BZAW 370; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 139–156.

17 Finally, the casting aside of the “foreign gods” from “beyond the river” in Josh 24:13–28 refers back to the renunciation scene in Gen 35:1–5, esp. 35:2b, 4. However, Gen 24:2b, 4 is likely a post-Joshua 24 corrective to this pro-Samaritan perspective. On this see below.

18 Cf. the overview in R. G. Kratz, “Der vor- und der nachpriesterschriftliche Hexateuch,” in *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (ed. J. C. Gertz et al.; BZAW 215; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 295–324; T. B. Dozeman and K. Schmid (eds.), *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (ed. T. B. Dozeman and K. Schmid; SBLSS 34; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006); and J. C. Gertz, *T&T Clark Handbook of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Literature, Religion and History of the Old Testament* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 237–272.

19 Cf. Kratz, “Der vor- und der nachpriesterschriftliche Hexateuch,” 295–323.

On the issue of innerbiblical affiliations in Joshua 24, the reception of the Priestly document is of preeminent importance for dating this chapter. Indeed, Josh 24 contains striking indications of a familiarity with Priestly language: הר שער as Esau's place of residence (Josh 24:4) otherwise appears only in Gen 36:8–9, a text that is usually accorded to "P."²⁰ The designation ארץ כנען (Josh 24:3) is also a term that is used especially in the Priestly document in Genesis.²¹ Particularly the expression כל ארץ כנען is characteristically Priestly, since it designates the further settlement areas of all of Abraham's descendants in the Levant, namely the Edomites and the Arabians, according to Gen 17:8.

The prominent mention of Aaron in Josh 24:5 (cf. v. 33) would be difficult to explain without the Priestly version of the exodus.²² The beginning of v. 5 could possibly be a literary addition, since it is not in the LXX. Finally, the depiction of the miracle at the Sea in Josh 24:6–7 indicates that this text engages an edition of Exod 14 that is interlaced with "P"²³ (cf. רדף Exod 14:4, 8–9, 23 "P"; פרש/רכב Exod 14:9, 17–18, 23, 26 "P"; כסה Exod 14:28 "P"²⁴).

Therefore, the Priestly document should be taken as the *terminus ante quem non* for Joshua 24 or at least for a considerable portion of it. This means that Joshua 24 is hardly older than the Second Temple of 515 B.C.E. and the conquest of Egypt by Cambyses in 525 B.C.E., neither of which is assumed by the Priestly document.²⁵

²⁰ Cf. Mölle, *Landtag*, 208.

²¹ Cf. Anbar, *Josué*, 87.

²² Cf. H. Valentin, *Aaron: Eine Studie zur vor-priesterschriftlichen Aaron-Überlieferung* (OBO 18; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1978), 36–45; P. Mommer, *Samuel: Geschichte und Überlieferung* (WMANT 65; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991), 126.

²³ Cf. also Blum, "Knoten," 197 and n. 68.

²⁴ Cf. V. Fritz, *Das Buch Josua* (HAT I/7; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 249; who naturally sees the relevant text portions in Josh 24:6–7 as "additions" because his basic text originates from "DtrH"; Anbar, *Josué*, 98–99. K. Bieberstein, *Josua – Jordan – Jericho: Archäologie, Geschichte und Theologie der Landnahmeerzählungen Jos 1–6* (OBO 143; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1995), 399; he sees in Josh 24:7, 11, however without any detailed explanation, "nur eine allgemeine Abhängigkeit von der so genannten 'jahwistischen Fassung' von Ex 14" ("only a general dependence on the so-called 'Yahwistic version' of Exodus 14").

²⁵ Cf. A. de Pury, "P⁸ as the Absolute Beginning," in *Les dernières rédactions du Pentateuque, de l'Hexateuque et de l'Ennéateuque* (ed. K. Schmid and T. Römer; BEThL 203; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 99–128; K. Schmid, "Taming Egypt: The Impact of Persian Imperial Ideology and Politics on the Biblical Exodus Account," in: *Jewish Cultural Encounters in the Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern World* (eds. M. Popović et al.; JSJ.S 178, Leiden: Brill, 2017), 13–29.

A relative literary *terminus ante quem* for the formation of Joshua 24 might be found in Neh 13:28–30, which presents a clear and critical response to the position of Joshua 24. Whereas Joshua 24 still promotes the inclusion of the Northern tribes (or as I would put it given the probable date of Joshua 24, the Samaritans) and calls for the dismissal of the “foreign” gods with an all-Israel perspective and a conspicuous Northern setting in Shechem, Nehemiah 13 views the Samaritans themselves as “foreign.” Nehemiah even prides himself on having expelled one of the sons of Jerusalem’s high priest because he had intermarried with the Samaritans:

And one of the sons of Jehoiada, son of the high priest Eliashib, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; I chased him away from me.... Thus I cleansed (טהר) ²⁶ them from everything foreign (גֵּוֹרֵם).” (Neh 13:28–30).

A similar case appears in Gen 35:2b, 4, which, according to Yair Zakovitch, Nadav Na’aman, and Hans Rapp, involves a critical reception of Joshua 24.²⁷ Genesis 35 makes its reader believe that the sanctuary near Shechem (that is in the background of Joshua 24) is nothing other or less than a *favissa* in which Jacob disposed of his family’s idols. However, these portions of Genesis 35 (v. 2b and 4) are difficult to date.

Joshua 24 is therefore later than the Priestly document, which belongs in the early Persian period, but earlier than both Nehemiah 13 and Genesis 35. It likely emerged between the end of the 6th and the 4th centuries B.C.E.²⁸

Whether one can further narrow the date on the basis of ancient Shechem’s archaeology depends on how one interprets the content of Joshua 24. Ancient Shechem, *Tel Balāta*, appears to have been unsettled between 480–330 B.C.E.²⁹ Depending on the degree to which one sees Joshua 24 as

26 On the terminology of „purity“ see S. Olyan, “Purity Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah as a Tool to Reconstitute the Community,” *JSJ* 35 (2004) 4–10; R. Albertz, “Purity Strategies and Political Interest in the Policy of Nehemiah,” in *Confronting the Past* (eds. S. Gitin *et al.*; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 199–206.

27 Cf. Y. Zakovitch, “The Object of the Narrative of the Burial of Foreign Gods at Shechem,” *BetM* 25 (1980): 30–37; N. Na’aman, “The Law of the Altar in Deuteronomy and the Cultic Site Near Shechem,” in *Rethinking the Foundations: Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible: Essays in Honour of J. Van Seters* (ed. S. L. McKenzie and T. Römer; BZAW 294; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 141–161, here 160–161 n. 54; H. A. Rapp, *Jakob in Bet-El: Gen 35,1–15 und die jüdische Literatur des 3. und 2. Jahrhunderts* (HBS 29; Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2001), 62–63. Critical are Römer, “Ende,” 542 n. 103; and U. Becker, “Jakob in Bet-El und Sichem,” in *Die Erzväter in der biblischen Tradition: Festschrift für Matthias Köckert* (ed. A. C. Hagedorn and H. Pfeiffer; BZAW 400; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 159–185, here 181–182.

28 Cf. also Knauf, *Josua*, 193.

29 Cf. K. Jaroš, *Sichem: Eine archäologische und religionsgeschichtliche Studie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Jos 24* (OBO 11; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1976), 47–48; cf.

pro-Samaritan by virtue of its setting at Shechem and its explicit address to all twelve tribes, Southern and Northern, then 480 B.C.E. could present a further *terminus ante quem*. If Joshua 24 were truly an offer to the North to join the South culturally and politically, then the setting in Shechem would fit better with a settlement that still existed. If Joshua 24 instead drafts a theological ideal of all Israel conceived in the South but not really envisioning cooperation with the North as equals, then a date after 480 B.C.E. would be more plausible. In this case, Joshua 24 would take place in Shechem as a theological gesture, but would not imply any actual competition with Jerusalem.

If one can assume the framework of these dates, then how did readers understand Joshua 24 at the time of its origin, i. e., in the Persian period? The opening in v. 1 is important for this question:

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God.

Israel presents themselves before God – and with the use of *עצה*, Josh 24:1 employs the technical term for a council. Evidence for this appears in 1 Sam 10:19, as well as in the scenes in heaven in the prologue of Job. Here in Joshua, the setting in Shechem is very conspicuous. It is well anchored in the Hebrew text (cf. also v. 25). The LXX, however, has *καὶ συνήγαγεν Ἰησοῦς πάσας φυλάς Ἰσραὴλ εἰς Σηλω*, therefore reading “Shiloh” instead of “Shechem” (also in v. 25), which may have arisen from the anti-Samaritan tendency in its *Vorlage*.³⁰ Interestingly, Knauf identifies the location in Shechem (!) as the result of an anti-Samaritan reworking of the text and deems Shiloh to be the original reading.³¹ Why? Knauf thinks Shiloh is a better fit for the original text, since Shiloh is right between Samaria and Judah, and the redactional transfer to Shechem happened in order to accuse especially the Northern tribes of the apostasy that led eventually to

Römer, “Ende,” 545 n. 121. The city was fortified again only in the Hellenistic period, cf. E. F. Campbell, “Shechem,” *NEAEHL* 4 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 1345–1354; Ahlström, *History*, 901. See however E. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 2 (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 427–28 who is arguing for an ongoing settlement into the 4th century. On the discussion of the tree sanctuary near Shechem, cf. L. Wächter, “Zur Lokalisierung des sichemitisches Baumheiligtums,” *ZDPV* 103 (1987): 1–12.

30 Cf. the discussion in Hjelm, *Jerusalem’s Rise*, 197 and n. 197; C. Nihan, “The Torah between Samaria and Judah: Shechem and Gerizim in Deuteronomy and Joshua,” in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding its Promulgation and its Acceptance* (ed. B. M. Levinson and G. N. Knoppers; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 187–223, here 197 n. 31.

31 Knauf, *Josua*, 195.

the catastrophe of 587 B.C.E. Knauf's suggestion is interesting, but it has not won the day, so Shechem is to be considered the original reading.

Why, then, is Shechem the location for Joshua 24? Joshua's speech is addressed to "all the tribes of Israel," meaning all Israel, North and South. Especially this invitation to the North precipitates the choice of an appropriate location. Shechem would easily come to mind as an option, given the broader context of Deuteronomy and Joshua.³² There likely are literary and theological reasons for the choice of Shechem. According to 1 Kgs 12:1, Shechem is where Rehoboam must go in order to be made king. Shechem was, therefore, the place where kings were enthroned. Because Joshua 24 reports the choice of *YHWH* as king – it is, so to speak, the founding legend of the theocracy – Shechem is a logical choice as the venue for Israel's decision. In addition, one should recall the bookends created by Joshua 24 and Genesis 12 at the beginning of the ancestral story: according to Gen 12:6, Shechem is the first place in the land where Abraham builds an altar.³³ Joshua 24 thus constructs a narrative arc back to Genesis 12. The promulgation of the law in Shechem takes place at the same location where the first cultic place for *YHWH* was set up in the land.

The narrative then continues in v. 2:

And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says *YHWH*, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors – Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor – lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. ..."

The beginning of Joshua's speech refers back to the idolatry of Israel's ancestors in Mesopotamia. This motif of Abraham's liberation from Mesopotamian idol worship became common in the history of reception, but it is noteworthy that it is not in the present biblical text of Genesis 11–12. Joshua 24:15 offers a standalone motif here; maybe its authors derived Abraham's original idolatry from the fact that *YHWH* has to reveal himself to him only after Abraham arrives in the land (Gen 12:7; 15:1; 17:1). Joshua 24:2 describes its addressees – unspecified in terms of North and South – as a still syncretistic religious community that worships Mesopotamian deities, even though not exclusively. If one considers the postexilic audience of Joshua 24, it appears as though the author of this chapter did not think entirely differently about the Israel of his own time.

This point is noteworthy, since, like 2 Kgs 17:24–31, this very evaluation – whether historical or not – is used to characterize the religious history of the North after 722 B.C.E.:

³² Cf. Blum, "Knoten."

³³ Römer, "Ende," 544 n. 118.

So these nations worshipped YHWH, but also served their carved images; to this day their children and their children's children continue to do as their ancestors did. (2 Kgs 17:41).

It is recognized today that 2 Kgs 17:24–41, especially the later insertion of vv. 34b–40, hardly provides an adequate view into the religious situation in the North. However, it is incontestable that, when 2 Kings 17 and Joshua 24 were composed, the religious state of affairs could be depicted in this manner (cf. 2 Kgs 17:34, 41, “until this day”).

A longer exposition that reprises the ancestral and exodus story then follows. Joshua's speech culminates in vv. 14–15 in the call that connects with the problem presented:

Now therefore revere YHWH, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve YHWH. Now if you are unwilling to serve YHWH, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve YHWH. (Josh 24:14–15)

The narrative world states clearly that Joshua presents the tribes of Israel with a clear choice: either YHWH or the other deities.

This concluding declaration of Joshua's first big speech is also an important piece of evidence for showing that Joshua 24 is not simply Deuteronomistic, as has long been argued by Lothar Peritt, Volkmar Fritz, and others. The fact that the people can choose their own deity does not belong to the conceptual repertoire of “Deuteronomism.”

In addition to the deities of Mesopotamia and Egypt,³⁴ the deities of the land's previous inhabitants are also named and classified as illegitimate. Joshua 24 apparently assumes the general *de facto* validity of the principle *cuius regio eius religio* (“whose realm, his religion”), but also indicates the theological illegitimacy of other deities.

How will the people answer? Initially, v. 16 states that

Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake YHWH to serve other gods.”

This answer is significant because of what it communicates about the people's self-perception. Joshua 24 characterizes the addressees of Joshua's speech as though they already worshipped YHWH, and they repudiate serving other deities in place of him. But in the narrator's world, the problem appears to be that the tribes of Israel serve YHWH, but not YHWH alone.

34 Sometimes the mention of the gods of Egypt is eliminated by composition criticism, correctly against this are Blum, “Knoten,” 198 n. 74; and Römer, “Ende,” 538 n. 79.

The people confirm their choice again in v. 18:

and YHWH drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve YHWH (נעבד את יהוה), for he is our God.

Joshua responds in vv. 19–21:

But Joshua said to the people, “You cannot serve YHWH, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake YHWH and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.” And the people said to Joshua, “No, we will serve YHWH!” (נעבד את יהוה).

According to Erik Aurelius,³⁵ Thomas Römer,³⁶ Christophe Nihan, and others,³⁷ vv. 19–21 is a later insertion. They base this argument on two main points. First, it appears to render pointless the solemn engagement that was just taken by the people in v.18. The second is that v. 21 offers a resumption (*Wiederaufnahme*) of v. 18: “we will serve YHWH,” but in the reverse order (את יהוה נעבד/נעבד את יהוה), corresponding to “Seidel’s law.”³⁸ We can forego for now the discussion about whether Joshua 24 was originally formed as the conclusion to an independent Hexateuch or whether Joshua 24 functioned from the outset as a hinge between the salvation history of Genesis–Joshua and the history of calamity in Judges–Kings.

Importantly, the people commit themselves to YHWH, but the issue of how exclusive YHWH worship is to be remains curiously open. This ambiguity marks the concluding passage of vv. 22–23:

Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen YHWH, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to YHWH, the God of Israel.”

Joshua calls the people once again to lay aside their syncretistic worship, but the people answer once again (v. 24):

The people said to Joshua, “YHWH our God we will serve, and him we will obey.”

The commitment concerns what is actually undisputed (worship of God), while what is disputed (*the exclusive nature* of this worship) remains open

35 E. Aurelius, *Zukunft jenseits des Gerichts: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Studie zum Enneateuch* (BZAW 319; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 175.

36 Römer, “Ende,” 539; with reference to Noth, *Josua*, 136: “Nach der Aufforderung 14 ist 19.20 sehr sonderbar” (“after the summons in 14, 19–20 are very odd”).

37 Nihan, “Torah,” 193–194 n. 17 (bibliography), 197 n. 30; Römer, “Ende,” 546–547.

38 On “Seidel’s law,” cf. B. M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18–20.

and to a certain degree forms the religious sword of Damocles, which will hang over the literary portrayal of the history of Israel until the catastrophes of 722 and 587 B.C.E. in the subsequent books.

Joshua 24 therefore appears to serve a double function in view of its implicit reader: One is that it promotes the exclusive worship of God, and the other is that in presenting the problem of actual non-exclusivity – which notably is held against *all* the tribes of Israel in both the North *and* South – Joshua 24 offers its own etiology for the demise first of the state of Israel and then of Judah.

We have already established that Josh 24 should be dated after “P” and before Nehemiah, so likely somewhere in the 5th century B.C.E. By this time, Samaria and Judah had been independent provinces for a while – this should be clearly underlined against earlier scholarship that is based primarily on the publications of Albrecht Alt.³⁹ Judah did not first become an independent province at the time of Nehemiah only. The epigraphic evidence – not yet known to Alt – reveals this in quite a few bullae, seals, and coins of its governors, which are substantially earlier than those attested for the province of Samaria.⁴⁰

For the ancient reader of Joshua 24, Samaria and Yehud were thus in all probability independent provinces. Joshua 24 opts for a theocratic constitution for all Israel within the framework of a religious orientation that, in biblical terms, renounces both the ancestors’ deities from beyond the River and the Amorites’ deities, focusing instead on YHWH alone. The choice of Shechem as the location for this scene allows little room to doubt that in both the narrative world and in the world of the narrator, the North is not the exclusive, but a very prominent addressee.

This conception of Joshua 24 is close to the basic convictions of the Chronistic History. The term “Israel” means all Israel. But unlike Chronicles, Joshua 24 is not centered on Jerusalem. The reason may be linked to the literary fiction of the scenery of Joshua 24: Jerusalem had not yet been taken. At the time when the narrative of Joshua 24 is set, Shechem remained a legitimate sanctuary.

It is interesting that the juxtaposition and interconnectedness of the North and South in Joshua 24 coincide with the almost contemporary texts from

³⁹ Esp. Alt, *Rolle*.

⁴⁰ Cf. R. G. Kratz, *Das Judentum im Zeitalter des Zweiten Tempels* (FAT 42; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 99. Magen, *Samaritans*, 8, speaks curiously and incorrectly of “the satrapies of Judah and Samaria.” Correctly against this is idem *et al.*, *The Aramaic, Hebrew and Samaritan Inscriptions*, Vol. 1 of Mount Gerizim Excavations (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2008), 111 (“two provinces”).

Elephantine.⁴¹ The Jews in that colony had their own temple, which was destroyed in the course of altercations with the Chnum priesthood. In the question of the restoration of the temple, they petitioned the governors of *both* Samaria and Judah with whom they apparently felt closely linked.⁴² The answer to this petition came through a messenger who referred to what Bagohi *and* Delayah said.⁴³ The governor of Yehud and the one from Samaria expressed themselves together. The correspondence between Elephantine on the one hand and Jerusalem and Samaria on the other does not give the impression that it was the first time such correspondence had occurred, but it apparently rested on a particular tradition.⁴⁴

What does this mean for the history of Samaria and Yehud in the 5th century B.C.E.?

For the relationship between Samaritans and Judeans, the claims in previous scholarship of there having first been competition and then separation appear inadequate. For the period prior to the competition surrounding the building of the wall under Nehemiah, one should likely reckon with a phase of concordance, as Benedikt Hensel has proposed in a recent study.⁴⁵ Joshua 24 – in conjunction with the documents from Elephantine – implies a relationship between Judeans and Samaritans in which living side by side in the two provinces appears to have been understood not in terms of competition but of concordance. Hence, Joshua 24 is in agreement with various early postexilic texts, in particular those from the Prophetic tradition that nourished hopes of the restitution of all Israel after the exile: Jer 30:3, 8–9; 31:27–28, 31–34; Ezek 34:23–31; 37:15–28; Obad 18–21; Isa 11:11–16; Jer 3:18; Zech 9:9–13; 10:6–8.⁴⁶ The competitive claims of Samaria and Judah in the later time of Nehemiah and finally in the combative actions of John Hyrcanus against the Samaritans turned this hope of a broad restitution into a thing of the past.

41 Cf. M. Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch zum Alten Testament* (GAT 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 475–485.

42 Cf. *ibid.*, 285, 29.

43 Cf. *ibid.*, 286, 1.

44 Cf. Kratz, *Judentum*, 94.

45 B. Hensel, *Juda und Samaria: Zum Verhältnis zweier nach-exilischer Jahwismen* (FAT 110; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

46 E. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 59.