Digital Samaritans

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Between the Raindrops and Two Fires: A Brief History of the Samaritans and Their Diaspora of Manuscripts

We are a small community, and so we try to go between the raindrops.
—Faruk Rijan Samira, Nablus, 1990

We have a big problem—we're between two fires.
—Joseph Cohen, Nablus, 2011

In order to understand the Samaritan textual diaspora, we need to understand the context that gave birth to it and show how the rhetorical concept develops out of Samaritan responses both to material circumstances and to the Samaritans' desire to be their own authors and to have sovereignty over their cultural and religious identity. Over the last five hundred years there have been three stages of Samaritan manuscript removal: deceit and theft, coercion and consent, and writing for tourists. These stages combined with the Samaritans’ historical and contemporary rhetorical context directly contribute to the development of some Samaritans’ ideas on the present and future of their diaspora of manuscripts. This chapter traces the emergence of the diaspora of Samaritan manuscripts as a historical consequence of Western interest in their Pentateuch (version of the Hebrew Bible) and connects this diaspora to the historical rise/fall/revision of attitudes to writing and their manuscripts.

To this end, I focus on the history of the Samaritan community from the late Ottoman period through the British mandate to their present day position between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. I discuss four significant events: first, National Geographic’s 1920 special issue on the Samaritans where the author predicted the Samaritans’ extinction by the end of the twentieth century; second, the establishment of the Samaritan neighborhood in Holon by Israel’s second president, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, and his rhetorical move to claim the Samaritans as fellow Israelites; third, the years of isolation, 1949–1967, when
there was very little contact between the Samaritan communities in the West Bank and Israel; and fourth, Yasser Arafat’s appointment of a Samaritan to the Palestinian Council on December 15, 1995, and his argument to claim the Samaritans as Palestinians. The recent events discussed in the previous chapter, such as the Palestinians’ and Israelis’ competing claims to the Samaritans’ cultural heritage, the isolation of the two Samaritan communities as a result of the war of 1948, and National Geographic’s yet-to-be recanted proclamation, are important factors for understanding the situation and context of the Samaritan manuscript digitization project.

I also examine how Westerners acquired Samaritan manuscripts, Samaritan responses to these various stages of Western manuscript acquisition, and Samaritans’ contemporary reflections on how their attitudes toward writing have changed. This historical foundation is essential for understanding the context of contemporary digitization and Samaritan calls for their cultural and historical sovereignty. As Mary Louise Pratt says, “If one studies only what the Europeans saw and said, one reproduces the monopoly on knowledge and interpretation that the imperial enterprise sought” (Pratt, 7). In most cases, the sources I rely upon are travel narratives and records of Western contact with the Samaritans. They display, especially in the nineteenth century, all of the traits and characteristics Mary Louise Pratt describes in Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation: a Western vision of an “imperial order” in relationship to those whom they’re discussing (x). The acquisition of Samaritan manuscripts occurs in tandem with major historical and economic changes in the region that, in turn, directly impact the already small community.

The relationship of Samaritans to their manuscripts has gradually changed over time. By saying that the relationship has changed, I do not mean that their religious or spiritual relationship to their liturgical texts has changed, but rather that economic, political, existential, and colonialist influences have changed, by the necessity of survival, their relationship to their manuscripts in diaspora. Major historical transitions changed their relationship to their scribal practices and manuscripts. First, fragments, and then later full manuscripts, were sold for currency to buy bread and subsist, particularly in the absence of other economic opportunities. Within a short amount of time, the Samaritans adapted to their material surroundings and began to write as a form of survival. Manuscripts were produced for the pilgrim economy of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ottoman Palestine, and this professional tourist economy of writing continued well into the Mandate period. Writing was no longer strictly about fulfilling the mitzvah (commandment) to copy the Torah: writing was also a means to feed starving families.

Although the Samaritans began to thrive economically after this difficult period in the early twentieth century, fundamentally their cultural milieu was
changed: thousands of their manuscripts and fragments, particularly those from their Genizah in Nablus, were overseas, swindled, stolen, or sold off to foreign hands. As these developments progressed, the Ottoman Empire’s power over Palestine had waned. It finally collapsed after the end of the First World War. Zionist settlement of British Mandate Palestine increasingly sped up, and the Yishuv grew from small settlements in the early twentieth century to the state of Israel in 1948; Arab and Palestinian nationalisms, particularly after the First World War, also began to assert their political visions for future autonomy from British rule. Ever since the 1930s, and especially after the 1936 Arab Revolt in Nablus, the Samaritans found themselves “between the raindrops” as economic hardship subsided and, in its place, mounting political pressure continued to develop. This chapter lays the foundation for understanding the diaspora of Samaritan manuscripts historically in order to better understand their present-day rhetorical context as they enter the digital age and the way some Samaritan attitudes toward their diaspora of manuscripts have evolved.

Samaritans’ Early History

Samaritans trace their history to the time of Aaron and understand themselves as the direct descendants of the northern tribes of Israel: Ephraim, Manasseh, and Levi. According to Robert Anderson and Terry Giles, the Samaritans have historically preferred to be called Israelites rather than Samaritans. The Samaritans “claim they originate in the time of the judges (eleventh century B.C.E.), when they say the priest and judge Eli established a cult site at Shiloh to rival that at Shechem,” present-day Nablus (Anderson and Giles 10).\(^5\)

Citing Feldman, Anderson and Giles quote that “the separation of the Jews and the Samaritans, like that of the Jews and the Christians, was not sudden but took place over a considerable period of time” (13). Over the last two and a half millennia, Samaritan history has touched Jewish, Greek, Roman, and Christian traditions:

Alexander the Great purportedly financed their Holy Place; the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, lost his position after a complaint from the Samaritan community; and the emperor Justinian practically decimated the community in the sixth century. Samaritan presence is attested in the Hebrew Bible (Christian Old Testament), the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the New Testament . . . Through Samaritan eyes we can also catch new glimpses of the rise and development of Islam as well as the turbulence in the Middle East during the Crusades and the Mongol invasion. (Anderson and Gilles 6)
As an Abrahamic faith, the Samaritans of today share core similarities with Judaism, and their history has intersected with Judaism as an Israelite faith. Anderson and Giles note that “there are three competing narratives concerning the origin of the Samaritan religious community: that of the Samaritan community itself; that of the ancient Judean community, now encoded in the Hebrew Bible particularly interpreted through the writings of Josephus; and that advanced by modern critical scholars” (7).

According to Samaritan Benyamim Tsedaka, “The principles of the Israelite Samaritan faith are four: One Almighty, One Prophet, One Holy Book, and One Chosen Holy Place” (A.B. Samaritan News, “Four Principles of the Israelite Samaritan Faith,” Feb. 2012, 58); however, Samaritanism and Judaism diverge first on the location of the “One Chosen Holy Place.” While Judaism holds that Jerusalem is holy, Samaritanism holds that “Mount Gerizim or Aargaareezem [emphasis added] is holy (Tsedaka). Samaritanism holds that Mount Gerizim, also called Har Bracha or the Mountain of Blessings, is “The Chosen Place of the Almighty to dwell His Name there” (58).

The principal differences pertain to the chosen place for the dwelling of the Almighty’s Name. It is written in twenty-two verses in the book of Deuteronomy in the Israelite Samaritan Version: “In the place that the Almighty has chosen,” whereas in the Jewish Masoretic Version it is written in the parallel verses: “In the place that the Almighty will choose.” The Israelite Samaritans claim that the chosen place has already been chosen at the time of the Pentateuch, and therefore the past tense form “has chosen” represents Mount Gerizim, the only mountain in the land of Israel sanctified in the Pentateuch to offer the blessings upon it (Deut. 11:29). It was on Mount Gerizim that Abraham built altars. Opposed to the Samaritans, the Jews claim that the chosen place was selected and announced in the period of the Davidic and Solomonic kingdom (1000–930 BCE), and therefore the form written in future tense “will choose” refers to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (Tsedaka, The First English Translation of the Israelite Samaritan Torah xxii).

According to Tsedaka, the Samaritan belief that Mount Gerizim rather than Jerusalem is holy stems from a literacy practice, where Samaritans continue “reading non-stop the end of [sic] chapter 11 and chapter 12” in Deuteronomy, thus leading “to the conclusion . . . that Aargaareeezem is the Place of the Dwelling” (58). In this regard, as Samaritan scholars Robert Anderson and Terry Giles explain, the Samaritans “believe themselves to represent the orthodox faith and Judaism to be deviant” (Anderson and Giles 13).

One of the core historical and theological disputes between Samaritans and Jews is the Assyrian conquest of Samaria and subsequent population transfer in 722 BCE. When Assyrian ruler Shalmaneser V conquered Samaria, or today’s northern West Bank, “Shalmanesr’s successor, Sargon II, exiled the
Israelites, resettled foreigners (Samaritans) in Samaria and made it an Assyrian provincial administrative center” (Berlin and Grossman 644). The status of the Samaritans for Rabbinic Judaism was in dispute. According to Amit, “Rabbinic Sages did not consider the Samaritans to belong to another religion, but were in their eye a branch of the people of Israel who, for various historic reasons, developed in a direction that was different from the rabbinic tradition until they broke away completely from the community of Israel” (Amit, Samaritans: Past and Present 263–64). Anderson and Giles note that in the Judean narrative, “tensions arose between the two groups over the Jerusalemites’ insistence that they and they alone were heirs of ‘all Israel.’ These tensions were expressed in competing claims to a legitimate priesthood and a gradual marginalization of the Shechemites concurrent with the ascendency of Jerusalemite Judaism” (10). Today, the Samaritan population is only 770 while the Jewish population is in the millions.

However, for Jews it is for these historic tensions that the Samaritans, according to Talmudic Judaism, are the “only Jewish group to which a special tractate of the Talmud is dedicated,” despite the fact that the Samaritans themselves do not consider themselves Jews (264). The Tractate, called Tractate Cuthim, is considered a negative term for Samaritans by the community. However, Jewish attitudes toward Samaritans are not fixed in one text but are spread out across several. As Itzhak Hamitovsky argues, halakhic (Jewish religious law) attitudes toward the Samaritans and their status as Jews or outsiders differed considerably between the Babylonian Talmud and the Palestinian Talmud (1–16). According to Magnar Kartveit, the writings of Josephus illuminate the Jewish “narrative about a priest who was forced to leave Jerusalem and move to Samaria because of his exogamous marriage to a Samaritan woman. In this involuntary exodus he was followed by other Jerusalemites who were in a similar situation in regard to their mixed Israelite marriages” (2). In contrast to the Jewish explanation of Samaritan origins, the Samaritans believe that despite the Assyrian conquest and population removal in 722 BCE, “a small group of Israelites [Samaritans] survived the destruction and continued to believe in the sanctity of Mt. Gerizim” (Magen 5–6). According to Tsedaka, “only the elite minority” of Israelite Samaritans were expelled by the Assyrians (A.B. Samaritan News, “The Jewish and Samaritan legends about the Lost Tribes,” 95). Today, the Samaritans’ Cohen Gadol (High Priest) is Aharon ben Ab-Chisda ben Yaacob, the 132nd to have the title. The Samaritans claim an uninterrupted succession of priests and worship on Mount Gerizim, preserving the ancient traditions of the “House of Joseph” (Anderson and Giles). According to Anderson and Giles, this understanding of continually “preserving the ancient traditions is reflected in their self-designation: Shomrim (“keepers” of the Torah)” (Anderson and Giles, The Keepers 13).
In *Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations*, Gary Knoppers complicates the label “Samaritan” as one that is “largely shunned by the Samaritans, who prefer to call themselves northern Israelite . . . or the community of Samarian Israelites” (15). Anderson and Giles also note that the verse from 2 King 17:29 reveals “that the שמרים of 2 Kgs 17:29 are not the ‘Samaritans’ at all but rather the ‘people of Samaria,’ whose relationship to the Samaritan religious group (שומר) is not clear” (Anderson and Giles 11). To summarize, Samaritans today are Israelite Samaritans, the former label Samaritan is used to distinguish them from Judean Israelites. Shomrim means keepers (of the Torah), and Samarian means people of Samaria or what is also known as the northern West Bank of the Jordan River.

Knoppers elaborates on Anderson and Giles and explains that the term Samaritan itself is “basically geographical in origin,” referring to Yahwistic Samarians from northern Israel or Samaria, and the label Samaritan is the result of the Septuagint’s Greek translation in 2 Kings 17:29 (14–15). While the early history of the Samarians and Judeans foregrounds the “difficult issue of ethnic nomenclature” (14), especially since there was “much that Yahwistic Judeans and Yahwistic Samarians shared in common during earlier periods of Israelite and Judean history in spite of some important differences between them” (217), by the first century CE there are “deteriorating relations” between the two groups” (220).

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, conversations about the Samaritans and their Pentateuch largely happened as a response to the Protestant Reformation and, as we will see in chapter 3, helped to shape Western interests in acquiring Samaritan manuscripts. For example, since the mid-sixteenth century, European and American collectors, clergy, scholars, and tourists have sought Samaritan manuscripts for a wide variety of reasons, ranging from religious motivations to collectors’ impulses. Today, the Samaritans’ diaspora of manuscripts has become a rhetorically strategic resource that may be leveraged to inform policy makers, laypeople, and neighbors in the Samaritans’ region about their unique history and cultural heritage. Now that I’ve offered a brief introduction to the various narratives surrounding the Samaritans’ origins as a people and a religion, in the next section I will demonstrate how scholars’ interest in the Samaritans in the sixteenth century led to a period of significant deceit and theft in the seventeenth century.

Deceit and Theft of Samaritan Manuscripts

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the West learned that the Samaritans had a valuable cultural heritage that intrigued Christians in Europe: another version of the Hebrew Pentateuch or Five Books of Moses.
The Samaritans, largely absent from the consciousness of Europe as a living people prior to the era of the Protestant Reformation, caught the eye of Protestant and Catholic intellectuals because their tradition differed from that of the Masoretic Hebrew. In the sixteenth century, European scholarly interest in the acquisition of Samaritan manuscripts was propelled forward by larger religious and political debates between Rome and England: “When the Samaritan version of the Pentateuch was revealed to the Western World . . . it made a very deep impression and inspired a series of debates on its place relative to other versions of the Bible” (Florentin 1). After Europeans learned about the Samaritans’ Pentateuch, scholars sought to acquire Samaritan manuscripts for their own Christian religious debates; however, there was a problem. At that time, Samaritans across North Africa and the Middle East were reluctant to sell their sacred manuscripts to non-Samaritans. As is the case with too many other instances of European cultural acquisition during the rise of the colonial era, some European scholars resorted to dishonest means in order to acquire Samaritan holy books. According to Benyamim Tsedaka, European scholars pretended to be members of a long lost Samaritan community, and they cheated Samaritans by making them believe that they had distant brethren in Europe, giving them the hope that they are not alone (Tsedaka, “Personal interview in Holon, Israel, 16 Feb. 2012”). By the time the first wave of European acquisition of Samaritan manuscripts was complete, European scholars succeeded in “purchas[ing] forty Torah manuscripts from Samaritans” (Tsedaka, “Personal interview in Holon, Israel, 16 Feb. 2012”).

This process of European scholarly contact and interest in the Samaritans began in 1537 with Postel and 1584 with Joseph Scaliger, and by the early seventeenth century the Italian explorer Pietro della Valle was sent on a political/religious mission to track down a Samaritan manuscript for Rome. In 1616, della Valle was told by the French ambassador to Istanbul that the “Samaritans had a recension of the Pentateuch which differed from that in the possession of Christendom,” and he was urged to acquire a copy for the sake of Christendom (Thomson 72). According to Benyamim Tsedaka, “he went to Nablus first and they [the Samaritans] refused to sell to him according to his [own] testimony.” Samaritan scholar Nathan Schur argues that della Valle sought to acquire the Pentateuchs for the sake of Christendom in “any way possible: by purchase, or by some trick,” and eventually he did find a Samaritan community that was more “amenable to persuasion,” and thus he was able to purchase two copies of the Pentateuch (Schur 129). Della Valle travelled to major centers of Samaritan scribal production—Nablus, Damascus, Gaza, and Cairo. In many of the locations, the prevailing Samaritan attitude of several communities was to decline della Valle’s request to purchase a copy of the Samaritan Pentateuch. We still do not know exactly what kind of “per-
suasion” he used or what the circumstances of the exchange were; however, scholars such as Jean-Pierre Rothschild have noted that this process of European acquisition is one “which a few consider to have been a form of colonial appropriation” (771).

Colonial appropriation or not, the process of European manuscript acquisition was not accomplished by outright purchase alone. Because Samaritans were wary of selling their manuscripts at this time to non-Samaritans, there is evidence that European scholars resorted to impersonation and deceit. After della Valle, a group of European scholars insinuated affiliation with a community of long lost Samaritans in Europe. As a result, Europeans were able to acquire Samaritan manuscripts in no small quantity. Perhaps one of the most egregious examples of such deceit was in 1671, when Robert Huntington, then British chaplain at Aleppo, visited the Samaritan community in Nablus. According to Robert Anderson, Huntington, with his working knowledge of Ancient Hebrew script, initially impressed the Samaritans with his ability to read their manuscripts. Huntington’s knowledge of Ancient Hebrew prompted the Samaritans of Nablus to ask Huntington if there were “Israelites” in England (Anderson, “Samaritan History During the Renaissance” 105). Huntington then made what appears to be a significant leap in his story and “affirmed that there were” and “they assumed that there were Samaritans in England” (105). However, Huntington went beyond a momentary cultural miscommunication. Sending the Samaritans of Nablus a letter, Huntington “gave the Samaritans an account of their English brethren” (S.C. 537). The correspondence between Huntington and the Nablus Samaritans continued for several years. Huntington, it seems, decided to exploit the Samaritans’ confusion about his affiliation rather than correct their false impressions. For Huntington, deceit paid off. For his efforts, he received “at least one copy of the [Samaritan] Pentateuch” (Anderson, “Samaritan History During the Renaissance,” 105). The Samaritans, however, received in trade a lie that would, on the one hand, provide them with a hope that their people’s circumstances were not so dire, and on the other, make them vulnerable to the ruse of Western scholars and pilgrims that followed Huntington and used his deceit to their own advantages.

According to Benyamim Tsedaka, the Samaritans of Nablus wanted to believe Huntington’s story was true, “because it encouraged them to know that they have brothers in some other place in the world, like London, Paris, and Germany” (Tsedaka, “Personal interview in Holon, Israel, 8 June 2012”). The impact of Huntington’s story reverberated for the next several hundred years. For example, in 1684, Jacob Levi of Hebron travelled to Europe to collect alms and met German orientalist and linguist Job Ludolph. Levi told Ludolph about the condition of the Samaritans in Nablus and, ac-
According to Silvestre de Sacy, Ludolph himself then began correspondence with the Samaritans:

Ludolf took advantage of his [Levi’s] return to enter into a correspondence with the Samaritans of Naplouse, and transmitted to them, by him, a letter written in the Hebrew language, and in Samaritan characters. This letter was safely delivered to those to whom it was addressed, by the Jew who kindly undertook to be the bearer of it; and having received from the Samaritans two replies, written also in Hebrew and in Samaritan characters, addressed, To Frankfort, to M. Job Ludolf, he likewise got them safely transmitted to the place of their destination. Ludolf having translated them into Latin, and added some hasty notes, communicated them to Cellarius, by whom they were published in both languages, at Zeitz, in 1688. To these he subjoined Edward Bernard’s Latin translation of the first letter that the Samaritans wrote to their supposed brethren in England. (de Sacy, “On the Samaritans” 128)

Because of the deceit of scholars such as Huntington and Ludolph, well into the mid-nineteenth century the Samaritans of Nablus believed that they had long lost brothers and communities in Europe. As a consequence, European scholars continued to exploit the Samaritans’ belief that they were assisting their people in Europe. For example, Robert Anderson notes that in de Sacy’s Correspondence, there’s an early nineteenth-century letter to the Samaritans of Nablus requesting a copy of their religious calendar on behalf of the “Samaritans of Paris” (107). The Samaritans, in turn, responded and expressed a sense of brotherhood to their nonexistent counterparts in Europe:

I give you notice that your letter reached us, and that there has been from us much joy, and what you said was already in our hearts . . . You say, my brother, that he is among you anyone of us brothers who keep the Law of Moses, our prophet is the one thing that we do not believe, consequently we have sent to you a Torah (to your country). You are to us our brothers. (de Sacy 101)

Beyond de Sacy’s Correspondence, well into the mid-nineteenth century visitors to Nablus write about how the Samaritans inquired about their brothers in Europe and beyond. In de Sacy’s Correspondence, the history of deceit and Samaritan manuscript acquisition relates directly to Samaritan decline in numbers over the last two millennia. This history of deception and appropriation has influenced the way the Samaritans’ textual diaspora was formed, and yet, despite this difficult history, now more than ever Samaritans wish to preserve
this diaspora and hopefully rhetorically capitalize on its ability to communicate Samaritan identity.

Mounting Economic Pressures and Coerced Consent

Well past the end of the eighteenth century, Samaritans did not easily part with their manuscripts to non-Samaritans; however, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century the Samaritans’ economic situation in Nablus became more desperate, and in turn Samaritans resorted to selling their manuscripts as an economic means of survival. For the Samaritans, there was demand from Western tourists and collectors interested in purchasing manuscripts as souvenirs, for libraries and museums, or for personal study and private collections. The process of “letting go” of Samaritan manuscripts occurred over a period of several decades in the nineteenth century.

For example, in the early nineteenth century there are cases in which travel writers report that they were unable to purchase Samaritan manuscripts. In a December 1821 travel account of Ottoman Palestine, Joseph Wolff describes how in Jaffa he was introduced to a Samaritan by the name of Israel. According to Wolff, Israel showed him three Samaritan manuscripts. When Wolff asked Israel if he would sell his books, Wolff says that Israel replied: “No Samaritan will ever sell his books!” (238). The Samaritans’ prohibition against selling Samaritan manuscripts is also echoed in a similar account two years later by William Jowett. In 1823, Jowett traveled to Nablus where he “saw several Samaritan manuscripts on a shelf, wrapped up in cloth: they were written on skin. On our asking their price, a young man said that they were not to be sold; that to sell them was ‘Haram,’ ‘prohibited’; and that every letter was worth a sequin” (150).

By the 1830s, there is evidence that some Samaritans began to sell manuscript fragments and charge visitors to view the Abisha scroll, the Samaritans’ oldest Pentateuch. For example, in Charles Boileau Elliott’s 1838 Travels in the Three Great Empires of Austria, Russia and Turkey, he writes that he was successful in purchasing a fragment of a Samaritan manuscript, saying the following disturbing remarks about his acquisition and the Samaritans: “The ‘cohen’ suffered me to purchase a small Samaritan fragment, written in the ancient character; a highly interesting memorial of a people now almost past out of existence” (Elliott 399). Elliott’s disregard for the rank of the priest and his choice of words to describe the piece of writing as a “memorial” is echoed in many of these travel accounts.

In James Wilson’s 1847 The Lands of the Bible: Visited and Described, there’s an equally disturbing account of a traveler making outright threats at the refusal of the Samaritans to sell him a manuscript. According to the writer, he “en-
deavoured, without success, to purchase a copy of the Pentateuch from the Samaritans,” and his conversation “went along this strain” (Wilson 74). This “conversation” included a veiled threat against the Samaritans, alluding to the colonial ambitions of England and the potential repercussions for denying these travelers a copy of their Pentateuch:

Travelers. — “Will you allow us to purchase a copy of the Torah?”

Priest. — “No, one is worth its weight in gold.”

T. — “Well, we shall give you a good price for it, say 5000 piastres.” (£50)

P. — “We shall on no account whatever sell a copy of the books of our prophet.”

T. — “Take care what you say; if the English come and take possession of the country, and restore to you Mount Gerizim, won’t you give them a copy of the Law in token of your gratitude?”

P. — “The English, we know, will come and take possession of the country, and we shall beg Mount Gerizim from them.”

The traveler, apparently aware of the past transfer of Samaritan manuscripts in the seventeenth century under the guise of trickery, argues that because the Samaritans “sold” manuscripts to Europeans in the past, they should also sell to him; however, the Samaritans display an awareness of the European past deceit and refuse to sell their manuscripts to the tourists:

T. — “You do not appear to us to have the spirit of Moses. He said וְעָלְמָה וְכָל הַגָּבוּז, הַרְיוֹנִי, ‘Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people.’”

P. — “Well, come and rejoice with us. Become Samaritans; and we shall give you a copy of the Law.”

T. — “You say, Become Samaritans. But, according to your principle of withholding the Law from us, how could we ever, except from independent sources, know what the Law is, and what the Samaritans are?”

P. — “It is in vain to ask us to sell a copy of the Law.”

T. — “Your fathers sold the copies which are now in the possession of Europeans.”

P. — “They did not sell them. They must have been stolen from them.” (Wilson 74)²⁹

By 1857, William Prime reports in his travel narrative that the Samaritans were selling modern manuscripts but would not sell older manuscripts (335); however, the purchase of modern manuscripts was not enough for Westerners, and the Samaritans continued to receive more direct pressure to part with older and more valued copies of their sacred books.³⁰ As interest in Samaritan
manuscripts became more intense on the part of Westerners, there appear to have been incidents that cross the line from idle threats. In 1864, just three years after this forced consent, Semitic manuscript collector Abraham Firkovich traveled from the Russian Empire to Jerusalem and purchased, in a single trip, 1,341 manuscripts and fragments, almost the entirety of the Samaritans’ Genizah, the place where older manuscripts are stored.\(^{31}\) This massive collection would become the cornerstone for the St. Petersburg University collection, one of the largest single collections of Samaritan manuscripts.\(^{32}\) According to Benyamim Tsedaka, Firkovich bought in one trip the “most important collection of Samaritan manuscripts [in the world]” (Tsedaka, “Personal interview in Holon, Israel, 16 Feb. 2012”).\(^{33}\)

In the late 1860s and 1870s, travelers such as James Finn begin to write about the large exodus of Samaritan manuscripts from Mount Gerizim thanks to the likes of Firkovich and others, and the destruction of Samaritan cultural treasure:\(^{34}\)

> I hear that of late years several more books have been purchased from the Samaritans, and so eager have the poor people been to turn them to money account that they have not seldom torn up these rare manuscripts, and sold a few pages at a time to such travellers as have been more ambitious of acquiring bits of things, because they are understood to be rare, than erudite enough to perceive the mischief done by thus dissevering a connected work, and concealing mysteriously those fragments in their private houses of England, Germany, or America. (Finn 229)

Finn’s account, similar to many of the other Western travel narratives referenced in this chapter, is quick to judge the Samaritans for their economic state and the situation of their manuscripts. For example, in his 1884 travel narrative *Among the Holy Fields*, Henry Martin describes the Samaritans as a “feeble folk, so few and so poor, that the high priest (a descendant of the tribe of Levi) ekes out a living by showing travellers the synagogue and the sacred scroll, and even offered to sell us his photograph!” (90).\(^{35}\) While the sale of Samaritan manuscripts and fragments fed Samaritans, the benefits of these manuscript sales were not long lasting, nor did they substantially change the Samaritan community’s economic situation in the decades to come.\(^{36}\)

Decline of Samaritan Populations in the Middle East and North Africa

In order to understand the significance of the diaspora of Samaritan manuscripts from a Samaritan perspective, it’s important to understand that the
Samaritans were not always located in only Mount Gerizim, Palestine, and Holon, Israel. Rather, they were once a much larger people with dozens of communities spanning at the very least from Alexandria in the west to Damascus and Aleppo in the east. Their contraction as a people, as illustrated in the map below based on Benyamim Tsedaka’s data, reaches its nadir around the time when their manuscripts are becoming more dispersed into foreign hands. These two processes, contraction of population and expansion of manuscript diaspora, are related: the former historical forces relate in direct ways to later economic and colonial vulnerability. In order to understand the relationship of these two processes in greater detail, in this section I provide an overview of Samaritan contraction.

Samaritan population figures are difficult to locate prior to the availability of Ottoman tax records in the sixteenth century (Schur 123). However, it is known from the archaeological records that the Samaritans were once a much larger people in the first century than they were by the medieval period, when 1170 CE Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela “found 1000 Samaritans in Nablus, two hundred in Caesarea, and three hundred in Ascalon, 1500 in all,” and not including Samaritan populations in other major cities and former centers of Samaritan scribal production such as Damascus and Cairo (Kedar, “The Frankish Period” 84). While this twelfth-century population estimate may seem high when compared to today’s figures, Reinhard Pummer notes that “[a]lthough it is difficult to estimate what their numbers were at this early stage of their history, a probable figure is 150,000 to 200,000” (Pummer, Samaritan Marriage Contracts and Deeds of Divorce 1). Pummer attributes Samaritan population decline to the reality that the Samaritans “were subject to hostilities virtually from the beginning of their existence as a distinct entity” and that this decline happened during the Byzantine and Muslim rule of Ottoman Palestine (Pummer 1). From the twelfth century to the sixteenth century, the Samaritan population continued to decline even more. According to Nathan Schur in History of the Samaritans, Turkish tax records for Palestine 1538 CE indicate a combined total of 220 Samaritans in Nablus and Gaza (Schur 123).37 Additionally, Robert Anderson and Terry Giles note that these figures combined with the total “populations of Egypt (ca. 200) and Damascus (ca. 100) would yield a population in the mid-sixteenth century” of approximately 520 Samaritans (91). However, 520 Samaritans in the sixteenth century was not the end of Samaritan population decline. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Samaritan communities of Gaza, Egypt, and Damascus were no more, and the total Samaritan population of approximately two hundred souls resided only in Nablus. By the end of the nineteenth century, only four families remained (Tsedaka, “Samaritan Israelite Families and Households that Disappeared” 222).
In “Samaritan Israelite Families and Households that Disappeared,” Ben-nyamim Tsedaka follows “in the footsteps of approximately one hundred and fifty ancient Israelite Samaritan and households and families mentioned in Samaritan sources” and tracks this history, detailing that the vast majority “disappeared from the historical stage due to slaughter, conversion into another religion or biological reduction” (222). From the biblical period to the sixteenth century, the cumulative effects of millennia of war, forced conversion, and assimilation into other groups facilitated the steady extinction of dozens of ancient Samaritan communities from Alexandria to Damascus. As exhibited in map 1, Tsedaka’s data in “Samaritan Israelite Families and Households that Disappeared” is presented as a Google map.38

In the nineteenth century, the Samaritans like many Ottoman subjects endured economic and political difficulties in the late age of Ottoman rule in Palestine. However, the Samaritans were a small minority and had less of a population than other groups to bear their portion of the Ottoman and later British tax burdens. In some cases, Samaritan minority status also meant that the Samaritans faced an undue burden. For example, in his 1862 “The Handwriting of God in Egypt, Sinai and the Holy Land,” David Austin Randall discusses one moment of hardship in which the Samaritans were forced into selling one of their ancient manuscripts:

A lordly merchant Turk from Damascus visited Nabulous, and dealing with a Samaritan trader there, accused him of robbing him of a large sum of money, and had him and many of his connections arrested and cast into prison, and there seemed no way of satisfying the avarice of their oppressor. At the expiration of a few months the priest made a visit to the Russian missionaries at Jerusalem, and told the story of their wrongs. “What shall we do? My people are in prison. I have no means to help them. Appeals to the British and American Consuls have been in vain; has the Russian Consul no power with the Turkish authorities to interfere for us?” “How much,” said Dr. Levishon, “is the claim against the imprisoned parties?” “The whole sum now demanded, including costs, is six thousand piasters.” “Can you not in some way raise the money?” “We have no money; my people are all poor.” “Go home,” said the Doctor, “and bring me that old copy of your scriptures, and you shall have the money.” Three days after the claim of the persecuting Turk was paid, the imprisoned persons were at liberty, and the missionaries were rejoicing over the possession of the most ancient copy of the Samaritan Pentateuch a Christian had ever been allowed to handle. (158)

In Randall’s account, the Samaritans are in one of their most vulnerable moments in history. Their population has declined to well below two hundred,
they are centralized now in Nablus, and they lack the means or influence to contest charges or corruption. In the Samaritans’ moment of desperation, Westerners step in with wallet in hand, ready to make a deal first for one manuscript, then later for more. While the sale of this particular ancient manuscript to Westerners provides the crucial funds to free the imprisoned Samaritans in that moment, the Samaritans as a people parted with a piece of their cultural heritage, one that had been in their possession for hundreds of years. From the era of Randall’s account in the 1860s and into the decade after the First World War, hundreds of complete manuscripts and thousands of frag-
ments were sold to wealthy Westerners in order for the Samaritans to meet their basic survival needs.  

The First World War and the End of Ottoman Rule

While the entire Samaritan population declined to under two hundred in the nineteenth century, this was not the end of their descent into lower numbers. The first quarter of the twentieth century marked increased hardship for residents of Palestine, particularly during the last years of Ottoman rule and the First World War. On March 1, 1915, a census of the remaining Samaritan community reported that there were ninety-seven males and seventy-one females, and of those ninety-seven males twenty-four were soldiers in the Turkish army (Barton, “The War and the Samaritan Colony” 3). Due to the Samaritans’ position in Ottoman-ruled Nablus, the First World War took a heavy and disproportionate toll on their small community. In 1921, William E. Barton published a paper titled “The War and the Samaritan Community” that reported “the progress and vicissitudes of the little Samaritan colony at Nablus” (1) during and immediately after the First World War. Barton, a clergyman and scholar of Samaritan studies, had extensive contact with the Samaritans in Nablus from 1903 to 1926 and worked on a philanthropic foundation, the American Samaritan Committee with J.D. Whiting and Edward Warren, among others (Pentek). In “The War and the Samaritan Colony,” Barton’s article includes correspondence from Samaritan Abu-Il Hassan Ben Yacop of Nablus. He writes on May 12, 1919, that the impact of the First World War on the Samaritan community was particularly severe in terms of loss of life, economic status, and Samaritan manuscripts:

You asked to be informed of the work of business affairs, the members of our congregation after the war, and how they are able to obtain the needful food. I am very sorry to have to tell you that they are without employment, and that there is not found among them one who has a position or business. For they who were in business lost it during the war, and now they have resorted for their subsistence to the sale of the ancient books transmitted to them from their fathers, and held by them to be beyond price. Cast thy regard upon this lowly nation, and thou wilt see it upon the brink of death by total extinction, if you do not set a bound thereto by assistance in its business affairs. And if not, then, as I see and as every intelligent man sees, lo, after a little while you will be able to read in history that there once existed a Samaritan nation in the world. As for the priestly family they have been kept barely alive by the income of the synagogue and from the sale of books which they copied with their hands. And now with sor-
row I must tell you that they are in a pitiful condition, and that the nation cannot remain alive for lack of employment. (13–14)

The impact of the First World War, its death, and related economic hardships continued to have a significant impact on future generations of Samaritans.

In January of 1920, *National Geographic* magazine published the lead story “The Last Israeliitish Blood Sacrifice: How the Vanishing Samaritans Celebrate the Passover on Sacred Mount Gerizim,” by John D. Whiting. Whiting, a colleague of Barton, was active with him in the American Samaritan Committee, and together they worked with Edward Warren to provide financial assistance to the Samaritans of Nablus in the early twentieth century. In addition to his work with the American Samaritan Committee, Whiting served as deputy American consul for Jerusalem, and he conducted census data on the community from 1915 to 1919, the year after the First World War had come to an end. In the January 31, 1944, issue of the *Palestine Post*, Samaritan priest Yaakov Ben Uri HaCohen recounts that during the First World War “Samaritan soldiers had fought and fallen in foreign lands while at home families had starved. The war had cost the community over a quarter of its number, including the then High Priest” (“Good Samaritans in Jerusalem Join in Prayers for Persecuted Jews of Europe,” *Palestine Post*, January 31, 1944, p. 3). Benyamim Tsedaka, remarking on Abu-l Hassan’s letter and Yaakov Ben Uri HaCohen’s reflection, said, “A whole generation of 24 Samaritans died during Ottoman military service in the First World War. In 1915 there were 168 Samaritans living in Nablus and Jaffa, and in 1919, the year after the end of the First World War, only 141 remained” (Tsedaka, “Personal interview in Holon, Israel, 28 Feb. 2012”).

In Whiting’s *National Geographic* article, he makes the dark prediction that he had witnessed one of the last Samaritan Passover sacrifices on Mount Gerizim:

As we turn for one last glance at the moon-lit camp and the redder glow of the flame with the pillar of smoke, we cannot but realize that here we have seen the last Hebrew blood sacrifice, and there comes the thought that it may never be seen again, for the Samaritans are a dying people. (46)

Thankfully for the Samaritans, Whiting’s prediction turned out to be inaccurate. Perhaps thanks in part to the negative publicity and assistance from philanthropists such as Barton, Whiting, Warren, and the American Samaritan Committee. However, the Samaritans continued to remain in a vulnerable geopolitical position during the remainder of the twentieth century. Addition-
ally, Samaritan manuscripts, sold and often produced to feed the community, were now dispersed around the globe.

Writing for Tourists

In the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, the Samaritans wrote entire manuscripts for sale to tourists, largely on paper and not parchment. In 1903, William Barton details how he was worried he was in fact purchasing “a book made to sell to tourists” (“The Samaritan Pentateuch” 11). In 1904, the Palestine Exploration Fund published an analysis of a manuscript adorned with “clean sacrificial leather, of the congregation of the Samaritans at Shechem,” which they describe as evidence of “an attraction to possible buyers among tourists” (Cowley 72). In a 1913 edition of *The Advocate: America’s Jewish Journal*, Dr. S. Weissenberg from Elisabethgrad writes that copying and selling manuscripts to tourists has become one of the few ways that the Samaritans are able to earn a living:

What are the means of support of the Samaritans? Some earn a living by copying their holy books for sale at extravagant prices to tourists and scholars. A few are clerks in the administration offices of the government. Some are artisans, but only earn a meagre income as they are dependent on Samaritan local traffic exclusively. (279)

The process of copying manuscripts continued after the First World War and into the British Mandate period. Henry Morgenthau’s 1922 autobiography provides an account of how the Samaritans’ production of manuscripts for sale to tourists even touched the Samaritans’ High Priest, who himself made a living “copying the Pentateuch in Samaritan” for sale to Westerners:

The High Priest explained to us that the material condition of the tribes was very bad . . . He, himself, was supposed to live on a tithe of the income of the tribe, but he said that this amount would not suffice to keep him for more than one month of the twelve, so that although he was more than seventy-four years of age, he used most of his time in copying the Pentateuch in Samaritan, and selling it whenever he could. Upon this hint, I bought a copy. (70)

Into the 1950s, when the economic situation of the Samaritan community finally began to improve, the Samaritans in Nablus continued to copy manuscripts for sale as part of their means of survival (Tsedaka, “Interview with Benyamim Tsedaka on April 19, 2012”).
By the 1950s, an estimated four thousand Samaritan manuscripts were no longer in the hands of Samaritans. Instead, they were spread out across four continents in the libraries, museums, archives, and private collections of Europe, North America, Australia, and South America. Given what the Samaritans have survived in the last several centuries, and especially the first half of the twentieth century, there is a shift in Samaritan attitudes about their manuscripts brought forward by the parallel economic and political circumstances the Samaritans have weathered and the role of their writing in their ability
to survive those difficulties. These historical circumstances have caused a change in Samaritan attitudes not only toward the sale of their manuscripts but also toward the circulation of their manuscripts. This change has in turn prompted Samaritan reflection on their current scribal work and its connection to the diaspora of manuscripts around the world, and the rhetorical work that these manuscripts do or don’t do in diaspora.

Zionism, Arab Nationalism, and the Samaritans: 1907–1949

As Whiting’s *National Geographic* article conveys, the end of the First World War was a dire time for the Samaritan community in Nablus. At the same time, Jewish nationalism in the form of Zionist aspirations in Ottoman and then British Mandate Palestine were on the rise. The two situations, the Samaritans’ existential circumstance and Zionism, would meet several times in the twentieth century. The first such meeting was through Yitzhak Ben-Zvi’s *aliyah* or immigration to Ottoman Palestine in 1907. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Abraham Tsedaka, son of Malchim Tsedaka, left his impoverished family in Nablus and, after two or three attempts in 1897 and 1901, settled in the port city of Jaffa in 1905, where he sought out a better economic future for his family. Benyamim Tsedaka\(^7\) recounts that

The community normally criticized everybody that left Nablus because they felt so few and united. But of course, he just left because of the distress in Nablus, the financial stress. So he went to Jaffa, which was free of disease because it was very close to the open air and the sea. He himself had some fortunes that he inherited from his father, and with this money he bought the place for the shop in the market and a house surrounded by big garden in old Jaffa, just some meters from the sea. So he had two daughters, Rashia and Zena, Arabic names, and then he had also six sons. The first called Marchiv, following his own father’s name, because Abraham was the son of Marchiv, first born, which is very common to call the first born the name of the grandfather. Marchiv, but also, he was called in Arabic Fabis, which is the same. And then the second son was Tsedaka, the third was Nor, or in Arabic Musbah, the fourth was Yefet, and his name in Arabic was Hosni, and the fifth was Goyl, which in Arabic is Badih, and the sixth Gamiel and the Arabic Jamel. His wife was Yarcha, or in Arabic Amra, which means moon. So these were the names. He raised them; he educated them. He slaughtered animals for food and conducted all the religious duties because he was the only Samaritan family in Jaffa and all the rest were in Nablus.
And first there was a lot of criticism about him leaving. But when he was successful, he invited priests from Nablus to come and stay with him for a couple of days and even to direct the prayer on Shabbat instead of him. He admired the priests and loved them, and they loved him. And step-by-step, the community changed their mind about him and they started to live with the fact that he moved to Jaffa. His success attracted other Samaritans to come and work in Jaffa, and at the end of the week they would return to Nablus. This was Abraham Tsedaka’s own contribution to the community, because even at that time in the early 1900s, the community was still in a process of deterioration. But he never lost his hope that the future of the Samaritans will be better. (Tsedaka, “Personal Interview in Holon, Israel, 28 Feb. 2012”)

From 1904 to 1914, the second Aliyah or wave of Zionist immigration to Ottoman Palestine arrived from predominately Eastern Europe and Russia. Many of these immigrants (Halutzim) settled in the area around the port city of Jaffa in the settlement of Ahuzat Bayit or what would become the city of Tel Aviv. In 1907, Israel’s future second president, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, then twenty-three years old, emigrated to Palestine and was looking for an apartment in Jaffa. It is here that the Samaritans first crossed paths with someone that would become a significant Zionist leader and future president of Israel, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi:

So in 1907, this gentleman, a young Jew from Russia immigrated to Palestine, and he started to work as a clerk at the Port of Jaffa. His name was Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. Ben-Zvi was searching for someone to teach him Arabic in order to understand and find common language with the Arab community. So he went to the market in Jaffa to search for someone to teach him Arabic. And when he entered the market he was attracted to the image of Abraham Tsedaka, sitting in the gate of his shop announcing his products.

Ben-Zvi was already a very active Zionist, and he was part of a movement to help Jews settle in Palestine. Ben-Zvi asked Abraham who he is, and he told Ben-Zvi that he is a Samaritan. Who are the Samaritans? Ben-Zvi had never heard about the Samaritans. And Abraham asked him, “Where are you working?” And Ben-Zvi said that he was working in the Port of Jaffa that’s why he needed to know Arabic. And Abraham Asked Ben-Zvi, “Where do you live?” Ben-Zvi replied, “I have one room in the attic of a house near the port.” Abraham said in response, “One room? Why do you have to stay there? I have a big house. Come and stay with me. I know that you have no money to pay me so just, come and be my guest.”
And Abraham took him to his house, but Ben-Zvi became more interested in learning all about the Samaritans. Especially when he saw how Abraham made every Shabbat with his children, making the prayer and singing with pride.

So Yitzhak Ben-Zvi came to the decision that whatever will be in Palestine, he would dedicate some time to rescue this old [Samaritan] tribe. They are the only descendants of the Kingdom of Israel, and the Jewish people are the descendants of the Kingdom of Judah. And this is what he did, all his life, until he died in 1963. He helped the Samaritans on individual and public matters. His home was always open to the Samaritans, and they came to him with every problem. So very soon he became a father to the whole Samaritan community in Jaffa and Nablus. (Tsedaka, “Personal interview in Holon, Israel, 28 Feb. 2012”)

Ben-Zvi’s involvement with the Samaritans ranged from a “thorough and comprehensive study of the Samaritans, their faith, literature and settlements” to what Israel Sedaka described in “Itzhak Ben-Zvi, David Ben-Gurion and the Samaritans” as a “love and admiration” from a “descendant of the tribe of Judah, perhaps even Benjamin, to the sons of his brother Joseph, the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh” (241). As a Zionist focused on emigrating Jews to Ottoman and Mandate Palestine, Ben-Zvi saw in the Samaritans a biblical link to the land. While the historical Samaritans had an uneasy relationship with the biblical kingdom of Judah, the state of Israel would have a more favorable view of their estranged cousins, the descendants of the lost northern tribes (241). Speaking at an event in Jerusalem for the persecuted Jews of Europe in 1944, which a Samaritan delegation from Nablus attended, Ben-Zvi “emphasized their [Samaritan] link with the land of Israel, their faith in monotheism, and their literature. Their one difference from the Jews was their belief in Mount Gerizim as the site of the rebuilding of the Temple” (“Good Samaritans in Jerusalem Join in Prayers for Persecuted Jews of Europe,” 3). The Samaritans, according to Ben-Zvi, were part of the family of Israel. This new relationship, however, was not entirely without political ramifications, and the Samaritans were increasingly referenced in political arguments between Zionists and Arab Nationalists from 1932 to 1947.

The politicization of the Samaritan population of Nablus and Jaffa came at a time when the Samaritans disproportionately suffered from considerable political tensions, crime, and general social chaos during the latter half of the British Mandate. From 1935 to 1945, the Samaritan community incurred a number of losses during this era of social unrest, including the murder of a Samaritan in Haifa in 1939; shootings and stone throwing in the Samaritan Quarter in Nablus in 1936 during the Arab Revolt; a shooting, stabbing, and
robbery in Jaffa;\textsuperscript{53} destruction of a holy artifact in Nablus; and instances where the Samaritans were unable to worship on Mount Gerizim due to violence such as during the Samaritans’ Sukkot in 1938.\textsuperscript{54} In October 1936, angered at the loss of British military casualties in the area around Nablus, the British Mandate government imposed a collective fine of £5000 on the entire city under the Emergency Regulations provisions. As residents of Nablus, the Samaritans were thus required to contribute a proportionate share of their collective punishment to the British, £50. When they could not pay the large fee, the British “distrained [seized] upon their property”\textsuperscript{55} (“Reflections,” October 5, 1936, 4).\textsuperscript{56} In 1938, the Palestine Post published a column commenting on the Samaritans’ political situation:

In the hills of Nablus, between Gerizim and Ebal live the few Samaritans who are left remnant of townsfolk. It is not surprising that they have tried to win tolerance from their Arab neighbours by flattering them. But that has placed them in an awkward position. For the Jews of Palestine can hardly acquiesce in a Samaritan testament which is not true to fact. Hence, the poor community is to be pitied, liable to lose the sympathy of the Jews, and to attract the hostility of the Arabs. Such is the price of lawlessness in Palestine. (“Reflector,” Palestine Post, August 5, 1938, p. 6)

This column seemed to point to the uncertain predicament of the Samaritans and their need to “walk between the raindrops” of the Zionist movement and a rising sense of Arab nationalism. In the next decade leading up to the end of partition, both political forces, Arab nationalism and Zionism, would make political reference to the Samaritans.

For example, in “Izhak Ben Zvi, David Ben Gurion and the Samaritans,”\textsuperscript{57} the late Israel Sedaka provides an account that during a meeting of the 1945–1946 Anglo-American commission charged with investigating the Palestine question, the Palestinian representative Ony Abd el-Hady used the Samaritans as an argument against a Jewish state: “Let the Jews live with us in peace, as do the Samaritans in Nablus (Shechem).” The representative of the National Council (Vaad Leumi), Ben-Zvi, responded, “Historical truth does not bear out the Arab claims as to the status of Jews in Arab countries. At the time of the Arab conquest the Samaritans numbered approximately 135,000 individuals. Some 13000 years later their number has been reduced to 200 people in Shechem [Nablus] and some 60 people in Tel Aviv” (Sedaka 241).\textsuperscript{58} In the above example, the condition of Samaritan and other minorities under Muslim rule was referenced as a defense of Zionist aspirations in Palestine. According to the logic of Ben-Zvi, if the Samaritan population were reduced to the edge of extinction under Muslim rule, could they be expected to fare any
better in a majority-Muslim state of Palestine? In response to Zionist statements on the Samaritans, in December 1947 the Arab Committee of Nablus called on the local residents “to consider the 200 Samaritans living here as the ‘Arabs’ brothers” (“Mercy for the Samaritans”). According to the Palestine Post article, the Arab Committee of Nablus’s 1847 statement on the Samaritans “followed an announcement that the Samaritans supported Arabs’ aims on the Palestine issue” (“Mercy for the Samaritans”).

By the beginning of the 1948 war, the Samaritans were at the heart of overlapping identity claims. Arab Nationalists in Nablus were claiming them as Arab brothers and Zionist leaders such as Ben-Zvi were calling the Samaritans their biblical cousins from the tribes of northern Israel. For the Samaritans, a new political reality was developing. The April 3, 1949, Armistice Agreement with Jordan would posit a new geopolitical reality for the Samaritans: they were to be divided by a new border, the 1949 Armistice Line, or Green Line.

Geographic Divisions: 1949–1967

The 1949 Armistice Agreement with Jordan meant that the Samaritan communities of Tel Aviv and Mount Gerizim were effectively cut off from each other. On September 15, 1949, the Samaritan High Priest Yitzhak Amram crossed through the Mandelbaum Gate from East Jerusalem to West “on a four-day visit . . . to meet Mr. I. Ben Zvi, member of the Knesset” (“Samaritans to Visit”). Amram’s visit coincided with the recent immigration of one-sixth of the total Samaritan population from Nablus to Israel. According to an article in the September 15, 1949, Jewish Telegraph Agency, “Minister of Immigration Moshe Shapira informed the group that the Israel Government regards the Samaritans as Jews” (“One-sixth of 160 Surviving Samaritan Jews Enter Israel for Permanent Resettlement”). Over the next eighteen years, access between the two communities was largely limited to a select few visits and Passover festivities.

In Israel, through the support of Ben-Zvi, Samaritans were afforded coverage under the July 5, 1950, Law of Return (Hok Heshevuth), “which states that every Jew is entitled to come to Israel . . . [and the Samaritans] were given immigrant rights and were classified in the population registry as ‘Samaritan Jews’” (Amit 256).

While the Green Line separated the two communities from 1948 to 1967, on both sides of the Green Line Samaritans saw improvement in their standard of living, and the communities began to grow. For example, in 1954, the Samaritan neighborhood in Holon, Israel, was established with support from David Ben Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. While the Samaritan community in Holon was doing well, the Samaritan community in Transjordan, on the other side of the Green Line, was doing better, benefitting from the Hashemite lead-
ership in Amman. In the Jordanian West Bank, this lead to increased employment opportunities for Samaritans in the Hashemite government.\textsuperscript{67}

For the first time in two centuries, Samaritan population began to increase; however, the Samaritans in Holon were cut off from daily interactions with their family in Nablus and, perhaps more importantly, the High Priest. Benyamim Tsedaka recounts how the Samaritans of Holon had to rely on a radio to communicate with their High Priest in Nablus for religious matters. For the Samaritans, one result of the June 5–10 1967 Six-Day War, the conquest and occupation of the West Bank by Israel, meant that the two communities of Holon and Mount Gerizim could once again have regular contact, relations, and resume a life together; however, the reunification of the two communities also came with a new political reality and, over the next forty years, new political pressures. What emerges in the midst of these new political pressures is greater efforts to assert Samaritan sovereignty in the midst of the political fray. The diaspora of manuscripts, their history of displacement, present locations around the world, and their potential future become more important as Samaritans argue for their sovereignty.

Post-1967: Between Raindrops and Two Fires and a Call for Samaritan Cultural Sovereignty

With the Israeli conquest of the West Bank came Israeli military and civil administration rule of Nablus. Similar to the years leading up to 1948, Samaritan life was complicated by the political reality of an Israeli-administered West Bank. According to Stephen Kaufman, “When news of the [1967] conquest reached Holon, the Samaritans there immediately arranged permits to travel to Mount Gerizim in order to celebrate the Pentecost with their newly accessible brethren. It was, as A. B. Samaritan News described, ‘the warmest reunion on record’” (21). Future Israeli presidents would pledge that the Samaritans would never again be divided. In 1984, Israeli president Chaim Herzog visited Mount Gerizim and pledged to the Samaritans that “[w]hatever the nature of a political settlement between ourselves and our neighbors, I can promise you that never again will you be cut off from your brothers” (“Herzog Tells Samaritans They Will Never Again Be Separated from Their Brethren in Israel”).\textsuperscript{68} In the ensuing years, however, this reunion was followed by the First Intifada (1987–1993) and Second Intifada (2000–2004). During this time, the Samaritans worked hard to “walk between the raindrops” and the “two fires.” But they encountered great difficulty. In 1989, a Samaritan woman was injured when a Bank Leumi (Israeli National Bank) branch in Nablus was firebombed (Sedan).\textsuperscript{69} In 1993, a Samaritan store in Nablus was firebombed for selling liquor. The Samaritans were in an increasingly difficult situation, and they
needed to take proactive rhetorical action in order to safeguard the contiguity and peace of their two communities.

Oslo Accords and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Oslo 2)

For the Samaritans, the Oslo Accords represented the real danger that the Mount Gerizim community would once again be cut off from the Samaritans of Holon. For a population as small as the Samaritans, their future as a people would be in jeopardy if the two communities could no longer meet. In response to this crisis, in 1995 Samaritan leaders embarked on a successful diplomatic mission to lobby Palestinian, Israeli, American, and British diplomats to adopt “Seven Principles” to safeguard the Samaritans’ future:
We, a selected group of leading personalities in the present-day Samaritan Community, leaders of the Community, editors of A.B.—The Samaritan News and directors of A.B.—Institute of Samaritan Studies, hereby set forth the seven principles which guide our efforts to ensure the future of the Samaritan Community, in the Middle East, in any political reality.\textsuperscript{71}

Their efforts to lobby the Israelis and Palestinians were successful. According to a news report in September of 1995, “State Department officials have promised to intervene with Israeli and Palestinian officials—who, say Samaritan leaders, have accepted the principle of free-passage documents” (Klein).\textsuperscript{72}

In chapter 3, the “Seven Principles” document will be discussed in more detail. However, it’s important to know that in the decade following the signing of the Oslo Accords, Samaritans continued to suffer difficulties during the Second Intifada. In 2001, Joseph Cohen, then fifty-six years old, was driving up the mountain from Nablus to Kiryat Luza:

“When I was almost home, I came across two Palestinian boys and they shot me,” he says. “The blood ran from me like water.”

He lost control of his car and drove into an Israeli roadblock. The Israeli soldiers shouted at him to stop.

“But I couldn’t stop the car. And so they also shot me.”

Cohen\textsuperscript{73} describes the Samaritan predicament in the region as to be “between two fires”:

“The Palestinians know we live with Arabic people, but inside their mind, they think we’re Jewish,” Mr. Cohen says.

“And because we also speak Arabic, the Jewish people think we’re Arab.”

“So we have a big problem—we’re between two fires.”\textsuperscript{74}

For an example of how the Samaritans are described as being between Israeli and Palestinian societies, in the 2004 \textit{Journal of Palestine Studies} article “Dispatches from Daily Life: The View from Nablus” Beshara Doumani writes that “the size of this historically small community of a few hundred is growing slowly and the material well-being of its members has visibly improved. This is happening precisely at the time that Nabulsis are suffering from a dramatic decline in living standards” (39). Doumani hypothesizes that if “this trend continues, the next generation of this most native of native communities may come to seem more like the colonial settlers from Brooklyn, Los Angeles, and Moscow than their fellow Nabulsis” (40).
In the July 2014 conflict between Israel and Hamas, the Samaritan community in Holon was inadvertently under rocket fire and one shell landed in the community playground. As Tsedaka and Tsedaka write at the conclusion of “A Journey to England to Ensure the Samaritan’s Political Future,” “still in question is . . . the uncertainty which tomorrow may bring . . . Precisely in an area so politically sensitive, we must keep our eyes open and check each day how to prepare for the new situation” (43).

In the next chapter, I explore the complexities of this contemporary political reality in relationship to their diaspora of manuscripts with a focus on what Samaritans want from their books in the future. Emergent from Samaritan narratives is the idea that preparing “for the new situation” also means communicating to neighbors and the outside world about Samaritan culture and heritage. This is not only a problem for the digital humanities but is also of concern for rhetoric. By examining the historical connections between the Samaritans’ evolving contemporary rhetorical situation and their present-day diaspora of manuscripts, rhetoric and the digital humanities converge in Samaritan interests for the digitization of cultural heritage in libraries and institutions abroad. Just as the Samaritans’ diaspora of manuscripts and its historical root causes of colonialism and poverty are interrelated, the rhetorical futures of both the diaspora of manuscripts and the Samaritans’ communication of their identity to the outside world are also rhetorically intertwined.