

The Day of Atonement

Its Interpretations in Early Jewish
and Christian Traditions

Edited by

Thomas Hieke
Tobias Nicklas



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THE DAY OF ATONEMENT OF THE SAMARITANS

József Zsengellér

INTRODUCTION

Those who have more information about the Samaritans than Jesus' parable of the "good Samaritan," know that this religious group still offers the Pesah sacrifice on Mount Gerizim. Generally, this is the only detail known of the Samaritans' religious practices among biblical scholars. In the liturgical corpus published by Cowley, more than one third of the 800 pages of liturgical texts deal with Yom Kippur. It is much more than that of Pesah. Consequently, as in Judaism, also in Samaritanism, the Day of Atonement is the most venerated festival, sometimes called the "chief of the Festivals" (Dexinger 1993, 65).¹ Despite this theologically demonstrated and in several writings displayed consideration, the Samaritan Day of Atonement festival seems to be one of the least treated and therefore the most enigmatic Samaritan feast² as it is noticed: 'Not many outside the community have witnessed the Day of Fasting or even partook of it!' (Sassoni and Sassoni 2004, 23).

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS

Samaritans are frequently referred to as more or less the descendants of the northern Israelites. From this point of view, for which I have argued elsewhere (Zsengellér 1998), the northern traditions of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament are of special interest. One of the core elements of

¹ Following the LXX reading, the Biblical text of שבת שבתות (Lev 16:31) can be interpreted as the "Shabbat of the Shabbats." In the 1st century BCE Philo of Alexandria (*De specialibus legibus* 2.193–194) also maintained this day as the 'highest holiday' (ἑορτῶν τὴν μεγίστην), as it is clear from the name of tractate *Yoma* (יוםא—“the day”). (Stökl 2003, 16–17). John Macdonald characterized it as “The most outstanding event in the Samaritan calendar” (Macdonald 1964, 267).

² In most of the scholarly publications there are very short sketches of the Samaritan Day of Atonement. Some of them only mention its existence before Sukkoth (Pummer 1987).

the northern traditions is the so called *Ur-Deuteronomium* (Welch 1924; Alt 1978).³ Interestingly enough chapters 12–26 of Deuteronomy, which are supposed to be more or less the content of this ancient document, refer to the three main pilgrim festivals but do not mention the holiday complex of Rosh-Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Samaritans, however, regard the whole Pentateuch as Scripture and therefore this festal time of the year described and prescribed in Leviticus belongs to their basic religious traditions as well. Before turning to the theology and liturgy of the Samaritan Day of Atonement the historical traditions of the feast need to be studied.

Yom Kippur is a festival originally based on Leviticus 16 and 23:27–32 and Num 29:7–11. In all textual units there are prescriptions of making sacrifices (animal and fire offerings). Leviticus 16 explicitly refers to the Tent of Meeting, as the place of the sacrifice to be performed by the high priest. There are some theoretical problems with this description. Where can this liturgy take place by the Samaritans/true Israelites and the Judahites respectively? Who can perform this liturgy in the one or the other communities or religions?

For the second question we can give a short and adequate answer. The foundation texts of this feast define the high priest as the leader of the liturgy. Consequently the high priests of both communities could perform the sacrifices. In this case it does not matter when and how the two religious communities were established or separated from each other. As in several cases of the First and Second Temple period, there were different high priestly families, so the prescription of the Law could be fulfilled by any of them.⁴

³ A fresh discussion of the reasons for the northern provenance of this part of Deuteronomy see Schorch, 2011, who maintains that the book's focus on Mount Gerizim gives a certain explanation for its place of origin.

⁴ The historical reconstruction of the Israelite high priesthood is very problematic (Cody 1969), especially that of the Zadokites (Hunt 2006). Deborah Rooke points at the cultic role of the high priests presented by the Priestly writer and emphasises his main 'responsibility for community sin and atonement.' (Rooke 2000, 35). VanderKam distillates the sources and gives a nuanced chain of the high priests in Jerusalem from the Joshua of Zechariah and Haggai until Phannias son of Samuel the last named high priest before the first Jewish War. Yom Kippur is connected directly to a high priest in the case of Matthias son of Theophilus (5–4 BCE) referred to by Josephus *Ant* 17.165–167. (VanderKam 2004, 410). On the Samaritan side the chains of the high priests play a prominent role in the historical literature. The *Tulida* (Florentin 1999) and the *Shalshalah* (Gaster 1909) are labeled as chronicles though they are genealogies of high priests with some insertion of short historical remarks.

It is harder to answer the first question, where did the Day of Atonement liturgy take place? In the Tent of Meeting? In a temple? Concerning the Jewish tradition documented in Ps 78:60–68, the Tent of Meeting, which earlier represented the high priest's place of service,⁵ was changed to the temple of Jerusalem. This holy place as the location of the high priest's service is presented to be a continuous tradition except the time of the exile.

The Samaritans own tradition is divided. The main and basic tradition maintains that the break between the Judahites and the Israelites happened in the time of Eli, who, as the descendant of Ithamar, the younger son of Aaron, made a copy of the Tent of Meeting and the Ark of the Covenant and led astray part of the Israelites in Shiloh. The true high-priest Uzzi, the descendant of Eleazar, the elder son of Aaron, took the original Tent of Meeting and the original Ark of the Covenant and hid them in a cave on Mount Gerizim. The cave was closed and hidden by God (Collins 1972) and this ended the time of the Divine Favor.⁶ Having no information against it, the Yom Kippur tradition of the Pentateuch text is valid for the period of the Divine Favor. It means that after the time of Uzzi, namely from the end of the age of the Judges, this Samaritan tradition does not go along with the performance of the Day of Atonement according to the Law. The only sacrifice the Samaritans maintain to practice continuously since that time on is the Pesah sacrifice.

There is, however, another tradition of the Samaritan chronicles. The Tulida mentions that there was an altar on Mount Gerizim, as ordered by God in Deut 27:4 (Bowman 1954, 14b and Florentin 1999, 85: 8ab.94). The Arabic Samaritan Book of Joshua and the Chronicle of Abu'l Fath report that Joshua had built a temple on Mount Gerizim, and in the time of Zerubbabel Sanballat restored this sanctuary which had already existed long ago (Juynboll 1848, 314; Stenhouse 1985, 94–95). All of these traditions make it possible that the Samaritan Israelites could perform sacrifices on Mount Gerizim at least on an altar or either in a sanctuary after the disappearance of the Tent of Meeting.

⁵ In the several texts mentioning the Tent of Meeting, its locations are different (Friedman 1992, 293–294).

⁶ According to the Samaritan tradition this took place in year 3055 of the creation of the world and 260 years after the Israelites entered the land. The Scriptural reference is in Deuteronomy 31:18: "I shall surely cause to hide my presence from them on that day on account of the wickedness which they have done, because they erred in following strange gods."

A third, modern scientific proposition is supported by recent archaeological excavations. Yitzhak Magen unearthed the remnants of a Samaritan sacred site on Mount Gerizim (Magen 2000; Magen 2004). The sacred site (*hieros logos*) was discovered under the remnants of the Justinian church of Maria Theotokos. Magen dates the first edifices of this sacred building to the Persian period (Magen 2007). The Hellenistic period provides more extensive building activities and a larger temple-city on the top of this sacred mount. Josephus compares this temple to that of Jerusalem (*Ant* 13.254–256; *Bell* 1.63). The remnants of animal bones and the great number of voting inscriptions found in the site make the sacrifice practice of the Gerizim community of this period unquestionable (Magen 2004, 9.14). Other inscriptional evidence comes from the Diaspora. In Delos two inscriptions were found containing the text: ‘The Israelites in Delos, who send their temple tax/firstling offerings (*απαρχομενοι*) to sacred/holy Argarizein’ (Bruneau 1982, 484; Kraabel 1984, 44–45; Kartveit 2009, 216–225). In 2 Macc 6:2 the temples of Jerusalem and Gerizim are mentioned side by side without distinctions. These material and written evidences point to the possibility that the Gerizim community practiced the Yom Kippur ritual in this temple on Mount Gerizim parallel to the practice of the Jerusalem community in the temple of Jerusalem.

The Samaritan temple was destroyed by John Hyrcanus in 128 or rather 111/109 BCE (*Ant* 12.295). It means that the Samaritans could perform their Yom Kippur holiday up to the last decades of the 2nd century BCE in the temple of Gerizim. Later only Pesah were said to be kept as a slaughter offering or as an offering practiced at all on Mount Gerizim. The destruction of the Gerizim temple signs the break between the two religious communities and from this time on separation and hostility increased.

Unfortunately, no texts survived from the earliest period of the Gerizim community which could inform us about their festivals and customs. Consequently, there is no sole adequate answer to the questions of where and how, but it stands to reason that during the existence of temples of Jerusalem and Gerizim the Yom Kippur festival was kept in those edifices.

How did the offering rituals develop without a temple? What kind of practice could be transferred from the prescriptions of the Law in Leviticus 16 and 23?

Though not at the same time, but in the same manner, Samaritans and Jews lost their temples, their places of sacrifice, their centers of religion.

Of course there existed already before the destruction of the temples other Jewish religious groups without temple. The Babylonian Jews, the Therapeuts in Egypt, the Qumran community in Palestine followed their own system of belief without practicing rites in a temple. Moreover the synagogue system was used both in the Diaspora and in Palestine by Jews and Samaritans as well. The local place of worship, the daily prayer and study were connected to these synagogues. Next to these similarities there are two basic differences between the responses of the two communities to the destruction of their temple. First, on the one side Samaritans kept their priestly order and the function of the high priest, as a strong characteristic of their community. On the other side Jews dissolved priestly groups, and set the high priestly office aside since both had previously caused significant breaks within the Jewish people. Second, in spite of the demolition of their temple, Samaritans kept one of the slaughter offerings, the sacrifice of the Pesah lambs. It is done more or less continuously against temporal prohibitions and sometimes physical danger (Pummer 1989, 678–684). At the same time, however, Jews gave up all their sacrificial activities but developed a theoretical system on how to perform the non-existing rituals all the more better. Jewish *halakhah* as a total philosophical or rather a theoretical practice in this field is on the one side, and Samaritan practice having Pesah as a living ritual, but the other festivals as a different *halakhah* are on the other side. Interestingly enough Samaritan and Jewish Yom Kippur practices differ from each other just inversely. Jews seem to keep literary more elements of the written instructions than the Samaritans.

There are no hints to Samaritan Yom Kippur practice in the contemporary early Jewish or early Christian sources, but the Pesah sacrifice is mentioned several times.⁷ Concerning Yom Kippur, the first Samaritan written sources are estimated to the 3rd or 4th century CE. This was the time when the great reformer of the Samaritans, Baba Rabba, the “Great Gate”, lived. His later contemporaries were Marqah and Amram Darah who wrote several hymns for Yom Kippur. The origins of these traditions correspond to the period of the Jewish traditions in the Mishnah. For a wider scale of comparison we have to deal with the liturgical texts of the Samaritans concerning Yom Kippur or in their own pronunciation: *yom akkibburəm*.

⁷ Justin Martyr, *Dialog with Tryphon*; Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History* 5.22.72.; Sozomen, *Church History* 7.18.9.

LITURGICAL TEXTS

“Liturgical mss. are so numerous that it would have been impossible to collate them all. Moreover, little would have been gained by attempting to do so, since they all represent the same tradition” (Cowley 1909, II. x–xi). By these words Cowley described Samaritan liturgical texts, though he published the largest and, until today, the only scientific collection of them. In his edition Cowley used several manuscripts copied in the period between the 14th and 18th century.⁸

The compositions of the liturgy may be divided into three main periods: first, the 4th century CE, when Aramaic was the language used; second, the 10th and 11th centuries, when Aramaic had ceased to be the vernacular, but was still used in liturgy, though it had become artificial and was mixed with Hebraisms; third, the 14th century and after, when Hebrew, mixed with Aramaisms, had become the liturgical language (Cowley 1909, xxxiv).

The basic material of the liturgy is collected in the *Defter*, the first known prayer book of the Samaritans.⁹ It has all types of prayers, also those assigned to the various festivals of the year from the period between the 4th and 14th century CE (Tal 1993, 69). Later on these festival prayers were separated and collected together with new prayers and hymns into the special prayer books of each holy day.

John Macdonald studied the liturgical material of Yom Kippur intensively¹⁰ and divided it into two literary categories:

- a. the main Festival portion, composed and arranged from different kinds of liturgical material.
- b. later, mostly “personal compositions” of medieval “giants of the faith,” like Aaron ben Manir, Abdallah ben Solomon, Pinehas ben Abisha (Macdonald 1963, 7).

⁸ “All MSS. of a service do not contain the same amount of text. The hymns are regarded as an expansion of the service, or as fitting into the original framework, and appear to be not all necessarily used on every occasion to which they apply. Hence individual scribes include more or less of them according to taste, date, or other circumstances.” (Cowley 1909, xviii).

⁹ *Defter* consists of common liturgical compositions. Its earliest extant manuscript is Vatican Sam 3 (Tal 1993, 69).

¹⁰ Macdonald wrote his doctoral dissertation on this subject, but it was never published and impossible to have access to, but he published a shorter presentation of the Samaritan Day of Atonement liturgy (Macdonald 1963), we use this work as a basis of our discussion of the liturgy.

a. The main parts of this text are of the Defter from the 4th century CE and were composed in Aramaic by Amram Darah and Marqah. Later materials are written partly in Aramaic, partly in Hebrew and mainly from the 14th century CE when a revival of scribal activities can be detected (Crown 2001, 19–21).

b. The second group is an ‘Atonement Hymnal’ and consists of more than a dozen hymns. “These were not all used in the actual Festival worship, but selections could be made from the Hymns, probably at the direction of the Chief Priest (High priest up to the 17th century) or by the choice of the officiating priests. We do not know which Hymns were used in the particular decades, but we do know that they were almost all written by Samaritanism’s greatest religious experts and liturgists of the ancient and medieval period.” We have to agree with Macdonald, that against their late date, “we must take them seriously if we are to evaluate the Samaritan outlook on the Day of Atonement” (Macdonald 1963, 6–7). Just to mention one eminent name of this group, the Samaritan poet Aaron ben Manir (end of 13th century) composed a Hymn for the Day of Atonement which consists of a liturgical rewriting of the 613 precepts as enumerated by Maimonides. In his native town, Damascus ben Manir read the works of the great Jewish author and modeled his hymn on it (Haran 1971–1976).¹¹

As a matter of fact the Shabbat liturgy forms the basis of all the Festival liturgies. Macdonald highlighted its tripartite form (Macdonald 1963, 20):

1. Defter collects
2. Readings from the Law followed by Durran and other Defter prayer
3. Appropriate *Qataf* of Biblical book.

The Yom Kippur liturgy elaborated this Shabbat liturgy by inserting Torah readings, *Qatafs*, given literary units, prayers, antiphons and hymns. The liturgy also contains actions such as prostrations, removing Torah scrolls from the Ark and putting them back, and blessings at the end. What follows is the order of the Samaritan Day of Atonement liturgy in the synagogue reconstructed by Macdonald with some modifications (Macdonald 1963, 21–24).

¹¹ “This work was intended to be recited as part of the Yom Kippur service. In other words, the author was not afraid to bring into the synagogue a work whose roots were planted deep in the soil of Jewish Halachic literature. The text itself has special Samaritan style.” (Florentin 2005, 53).

Evening liturgy:

1. Introductory prayers and Atonement *Qataf*
2. Five Genesis readings + Liturgical Units + medieval Hymns connected to the readings
3. Five Exodus readings + Liturgical Units + medieval compositions
4. One Leviticus reading after congregational *Qataf* and prayers with antiphons
5. Closing of the evening service with *Qatafs*, special 18th century Hymns, the *Manat* and three *Segudot*.

Morning liturgy:

1. Introductory medieval *Malifut*, Defter collects and an early Hymn.
2. Four Leviticus readings (continuing the evening reading) + Liturgical Units + medieval *Eqr'us* and *Shabhu'as*
3. Four Numbers readings + Liturgical Units + 14th–18th century *Eqr'us* and *Shabhu'as* and *Midrashes*
4. Two Deuteronomy readings + late *Kimes*, Defter collects, removal of scrolls from the Ark, antiphons and special late Hymns
5. Closing of the morning service with congregational *Qataf* and last Deuteronomy reading. Defter collects, Closing and removal of Scrolls, 3 *Segudot*, Commemoration and Blessing of Moses.

There are some special Samaritan liturgical terms in this order which need clarification.

Qataf is the biblical text displayed in a special form during the whole liturgy. According to Reinhard Pummer, “A *Qataf* is an abbreviated form of reciting biblical texts” (Pummer 1989, 674). Cowley saw it “as a string of scriptural passages connected by one idea or word” (Cowley 1909, lxxviii). But as he recognized earlier, its origin could be more plausibly defined as they served “when liturgy consisted chiefly of biblical passages, as headings of the parts to be recited (something like the Talmudic *simanim*), and that afterwards, when the services grew in length, the headings only were read.” Macdonald described three different types of *Qatafs*: *Qataf* of the Law, Festival *Qataf* and Special Creedal *Qataf* (Macdonald 1963, 25–30).

A strict portion of a given *Liturgical Unit* repeated during the liturgy. It consists of seven parts: a *Durran* (“string of pearls”), which is a piece from the 4th century part of the Defter; a *Marqah* piece from the 4th century part of the Defter; a *Yishtabbah* (“He is to be praised”), a pre-14th century responsorial poem; *Rab Elah* (“Great is the Lord”), a short

creedal acknowledgement; a *Ki be-Shem* (“In the name of the Lord”) is a short response derived from Deut 32:3–4; a *Yithrabbe* (“He is to be magnified”), a 4th century hymn from the Defter; a *Malifut* (“words of illumination”), a 14–18th centuries poem based on a given biblical passage and illuminates it (Macdonald 1963, 14–20).

Later medieval compositions: hymns (*shirah*); *Kime* (“As long as . . .”) begins with the first words of Deut 11:21; *Eqr’u* (“Proclaim”) is a type of poem on Moses with some fix portions; *Shabu’a* (“seven days”) is the complement of *Eqr’u*. *Maran* (“our Lord”) is an invocation; *Sabbehu* (“Give praise”) is a praise; *Midrash* (“supplication”) is a repentance (nothing to do with the Jewish term of Scriptural interpretation) (Macdonald 1963, 30–43).

Antiphon of the Samaritan liturgy: this differs from the common manner of Near-Eastern presentation of the antiphon, where two groups response to each other like in the case of the blessings and curses in Deut 27:9–13 and Josh 8:33. Samaritans practice the antiphon in a Christian manner, the response is between the priest and the congregation (Macdonald 1963, 44–45).

Segudot—prostrations made twice as pieces of the closing acts of the last parts of the evening and morning liturgy. A special feature of these prostrations is the utterance of Lev 16:34 and 16:31 (Cowley 1909, 663.715; Macdonald 1963, 46).

Two portions describing the theological importance of the Day of Atonement are helpful to quote. The first is a piece from a *Yistabbah* (Macdonald 1963, 16–17):

O Power who ordained for Israel seven important Festival of sublime holiness –
of these is the Day of Atonement, in which there is atonement for all sin and guilt,
and in which all the congregation stand from eve to eve,
praying, reciting the Reading from the Law of the Lord
Blessed are you who guard your soul and heart
And stand before our Lord, stretching forth your hand
And say, “Turn from Thy fierce anger, Lord YHWH” (*Shemma*)

The second piece is a stanza from the commemoration (*dekhor*) of priest Ghazal ben Isaac from the 18th century (Cowley 1909, 661; Macdonald 1963, 43–44):

This Day of Atonement is “waved” and exalted above all days.
It is sanctified and magnified; there is no day like it. It is called The Fast,

Twenty-four hours out of the days of the year which take precedence!
 In ten days of the month there are forgivenesses each day.
 O blessed is he who repents, who is earnest in his repentance.

As Ferdinand Dexinger noted: “The wording of the Samaritan liturgy has nothing in common with the wording of the Jewish liturgy except for biblical quotations and allusions” (Dexinger 1993, 65). Even if we see the later origin of these texts, the theological roots are mainly paraphrased biblical portions from the post-Gerizim temple period. Nevertheless theological and liturgical influence of Jews, Christians and Muslims can be detected in the praxis and theological thinking of Samaritan Yom Kippur. We now turn to this question.

PRAXIS AND THEOLOGY:
 SAMARITAN VERSUS JEWISH DAY OF ATONEMENT

In Tosefta Pisha 2:3 ‘Rabban Simon ben Gamliel says: “Any religious duty which the Samaritans preserved they observe with far greater punctiliousness than the Israelites”’ (Neusner 1986, 120). In this statement, frequently quoted in the Talmud, no real practice of the Samaritans is mentioned, but the difference between the two groups is evident. The Samaritans did not observe all the religious rules that the Jews did, but what they did observe they did so scrupulously. The *baraita* here could portray a late mid-2nd century opinion, since the participants of the discussion in 2:3 are both fourth generation rabbis. However, the unnamed opening *halakhah* is a *baraita*, i.e. is not apparent in the Mishnah, therefore less datable than those of the Mishnah.

To compare the theological and liturgical differences between Jews and Samaritans, we can recall the pre-3rd century tractate Yoma of the Mishnah in which the Jewish customs or at least the imagined or expected habits are documented (see Stemberger’s article in this volume). Mostly the duty of the high priest, as it is prescribed in the biblical text, is analyzed here, but there are two general *mishnayot* concerning the people of Israel:

On the Day of Atonement it is forbidden to eat, drink, bathe, put on any sort of oil, put on a sandal, or engage in sexual relation. But a king and a bride wash their faces. “And a woman who have given birth may put on her sandal,” the words of R. Eliezer. And sages prohibit. He who eats a large date’s bulk (of food), inclusive of its pit—he who drinks the equivalent in liquids to a mouthful—is liable. All sorts of food join together to form the volume of a mouthful. He who eats and he who drinks—(these

prohibited volumes) do not join together (to impose liability for eating or for drinking, respectively). (Yoma 8:1)

As to children, they do not impose a fast on them on the Day of Atonement. But they educate them a year or two in advance, so that they will be used to doing the religious duties. (Yoma 8:4) (Neusner 1988, 277–278)

These prescriptions do not concern the manner how the congregation takes part in the liturgy of the synagogue, but summarize the prohibitions valid on the Day of Atonement in five points:

1. No eating and drinking (except children under two years)
2. No wearing of leather shoes
3. No bathing or washing
4. No anointing oneself with perfumes or lotions
5. No sexual relations

Such an ancient source did not survive concerning the Samaritan costumes or prohibitions regarding the Day of Atonement. As we saw, the earliest theological and liturgical documents are thought to be written in the 4th century CE, and the first manuscripts of the liturgy survived from the 14th century CE. There are also new developments. The five prohibitions of the Jews were also appended by several prescriptions and customs during the centuries. Therefore if we would like to see the differences between Jewish and Samaritan concept of the Day of Atonement, it seems to be reasonable to compare the modern practice of the two religious groups instead of going into conjectures. We discuss here the main differences and the parallels respectively.

The main differences can be divided into two categories: praxis and theology.

(a) Differences in praxis: We must first mention the calendar differences between Jews and Samaritans. Both groups have lunisolar calendars,¹² and both calendar systems have cycles of 19 years with seven leap years, each one consisting of 13 months. But the counting of the beginning of the years and the utilization of the leap years are different, the Jews have fixed leap years (3rd; 6th; 8th; 11th; 14th; 17th; 19th), the Samaritans intercalate a month only when the conjunction of the first month will

¹² Samaritans in their lunisolar system mixed the Babylonian lunisolar year with the Julian, the Gregorian, and the Persian solar years (Powels 1989, 700–712).

occur on or after the twelfth of *ādar* (of the Julian calendar; the month of *ādar* corresponds to March), so the new year is a leap year (Powels 1989, 715). The result of this dissimilar practice could be a difference of one month between the days of the festivals. Another calendar dissimilarity is that the Samaritans do not intercalate a plus day to the 9th month (*kislev*) to avoid that the first day of *tishri* (the first day of the year) would fall on Sunday, Wednesday or Friday, consequently the first days of the three festivals in *tishri* could not fall on the day after Shabbat.

Instead of the Jewish *Rosh Hashanah*, Samaritans called the first day of *tishri* the *Feast of the Seventh Month* (*moed hadash hashevi'i*). It serves to prepare for the Day of Atonement. Ezra's prohibition of mourning (Neh 8:9) seems to be a change in the original ritual, which is kept by the Samaritans. *Rosh Hashanah* as the preparation for the Day of Atonement is reserved in the Jewish liturgical element of the *tashlikh*, casting their sins behind (Thomson 1919, 134). This custom of the Ashkenazim recorded first in the *Sefer ha-Maharil* (*Erev Yom Kippur* 42b–43a), was taken over later also by the Sephardim (Steinman 1975, 102).

The following nine days until the Day of Atonement are called by the Samaritans either *teshat yome hateshuvah* "Nine Days of Repentance" or *eser yome hashelihot* "Ten Days of Penitential Prayers" (including the day of the *Feast of the Seventh Month*). During this time people remember their sins of the past year, but visualizing at the same time God's universal love towards men, through which he forgives them. The Jews call it *aseret yeme teshuvah*, "Ten Days of Repentance" (Maimonides, *Hilchot Teshuvah* 3:4)

The beginning and end of the Samaritan Yom Kippur is signed by the blowing of the *shofar* (Tsedaka 2011). Although there are different allusions about the usage of the *shofar* after the disappearance of the Tabernacle or after the destruction of the temple (Pummer 1989, 686; Dexinger 1993, 66), nowadays it is used (See photo 1; all photographs by Ori Orhof, Israel). The Jewish liturgy ends with the long sound of the *shofar* (De Vries 1981, 100).

All the ceremonies of the day prescribed in Leviticus and Numbers are resolved into prayer and fasting. In this Samaritans are unlike the orthodox Jews, who retain a suggestion of the sacrificial element, on the eve of the 10th of *tishri*, for every man a cock and for every woman a hen is killed. The rite is called *kapparoth* (*Sefer ha-Maharil*, *Erev Yom Kippur* 42b–43a; Lauterbach 1935). Among the Samaritans there is no similar surviving ritual.



Photo 1. Samaritan priest blows the *shofar* at the beginning of the Yom Kippur feast. (Photo credits: Ori Orhof, Israel)

All members of the congregation have to fast, only babies who are being nursed by their mothers are exempt, although their mother must fast. The eleventh century Samaritan scholar, Abū'l Ḥassan aṣ Ṣūrī in his *Kitāb at-Ṭabbāḥ* 190b–191a discusses the meaning of *nefesh*, which is used in the Law, to clarify why Samaritans in contrast to Jews let their children fast (Lowy 1977, 356). The ultimate reason is written in the Law: “Indeed, any person who does not practice self-denial throughout that day shall be cut off from his kin” (Lev 23:29).

For Jews there are several fasts, but the *Yom Kippur* is the only fast of the Samaritans.

Prayers continue from evening to evening, without pause (photo 2). The official start of the feast is one or half-an-hour before sunset and ends after the sunset on the next day. It is almost the same practice like that of the Jews. Even Jewish synagogues are open during the night. But among Samaritans, some people must always pray in the synagogue during the more than 24 hour holy day. Among the Samaritans there should not have to be a *minyān* (ten men) in the Synagogue for a valid community prayer.

This is the only day when women are allowed to take part in the Samaritan synagogue service. The practice that women are prohibited



Photo 2. Prayer worship in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur. (Photo credits: Ori Orhof, Israel)

from taking part in the usual synagogue services may be an Islamic influence (Pummer 1989, 687).

Due to the *Qataf* form of Scripture reading, the whole Torah is read on the Samaritan Day of Atonement service. In the Jewish service there are also some “Qataf type” Scripture readings in the prayers (Dexinger 1995, 59–60), but the whole Torah is not read. Next to these prayers Jews also read Lev 16 during the morning service, Lev 18 and the Book of Jonah in the afternoon (De Vries 1981, 97).

There are no memorial candles lit for the Samaritan Yom Kippur service, like the Jews do (Steinman 1975, 103).

In the last section of each part of the Samaritan prayer service the act of *prostration* (*proskynesis*) is performed. While in the Jewish Day of Atonement liturgy it is only during the last portion of the *Musaf* prayer (*‘alenu leshabbeah*) that kneeling or prostration occurs. (Nulman 1993).

Torah scrolls are not only taken out to read but also to honor by the Samaritans in the last part of the Yom Kippur liturgy. This practice is similar to that of *Simchat Torah* of the Jews. But as part of the *Kol Nidre* service, there are also Jewish communities who remove some or all the Torah scrolls from the Ark (Steinman 1975, 104). Next to the occasion



Photo 3. The famous Abisha scroll exhibited during the last part of the Yom Kippur service. (Photo credits: Ori Orhof, Israel)

between Passover and Massot, this is the other case when the famous Abisha scroll is also taken out of the Ark of the Gerizim synagogue (photo 3).

The members of the community bless the priests holding the Torah (photo 4). This seems to be borrowed from the Arabic rite “to wish the neighbors well for the festival” (Florentin 2005, 139, note 272).

Before the closing sound of the *shofar* the high priest reads words of the Priestly blessing to bless the community. Since the Jews have no high priest, this part is missing from the liturgy, but it is the root of the Jewish *ne’ilah* service derived from Ta’anit 4:1. Additionally, before the start of the synagogue service, Jewish fathers bless their families at home (Steinman 1975, 104).

When the Day of Atonement passed, preparations for *Sukkot* begin among the Samaritans.

(b) There are several theological differences: According to the 18th century Samaritan Bible commentator, Ibrahim ibn Ya’qub ibn Murġan, Moses made three fasts of 40 days (total 120 days). The first started when he climbed up Mount Sinai to meet God (Exod 24:18 and Deut 9:11) and the third finished on the tenth day of the seventh month, on the Day



Photo 4. Priests raise the Torah scrolls during the blessings at the end of the Yom Kippur feast. (Photo credits: Ori Orhof, Israel)

of Atonement (Bowman 1977, 232). This connotation makes the Day of Atonement more reverent the “day of pardon and expiation for the whole year.” The Jewish tradition connects the day on which Moses after 40 days came back from the Sinai, with Yom Kippur but without any reference to his fast.

During the time of *teshat yome hateshuvah* there is an important event to commemorate. According to Samaritan tradition, “Moses, the prophet was born at the seventh hour of the seventh day of the seventh month” (Cowley 1909, 456 1.f; Dexinger 1995, 65). The Jewish tradition refers to Moses’ date of birth on the seventh of *adar* (Meg 13b).

According to the wording *Shabbat shabbaton* of Lev 16:31, the Day of Atonement is regarded by the Samaritans always as a *Shabbat*.

Yoma 3:8 and 6:3 deal with the tetragrammaton’s proper pronunciation by the high priest. There is no such question in the Samaritan theological writings or in the liturgy.

In the Samaritan theological ideas connected to the Day of Atonement repentance and forgiveness stay in the middle. Both are connected to a better future, in two aspects, one is the next year and the other is the life after death. Thoughts of repentance connected to the Day of Vengeance

and Recompense, that is to say to eschatology, dominate the Samaritan Yom Kippur liturgy which is evident from the hymns of the famous poet Abisha ben Pinhas for the Day of Atonement. This is a portion of this cycle:

The whole nature will be turned and the rivers and mountains from the quacking of the Day of Vengeance, from the great and terrible day, the Day of Vengeance, the great day, woe unto those who deny.

(Cowley 1909, 515 l. 3–19; Dexinger 1989, 286)

Jews connect the Day of Judgment with Rosh Hashanah, to the “day on which the world was born anew.” (Goldschmidt 1970, 259).

Another eschatological thought, the opening doors of the *Gan Eden*, is connected to Yom Kippur by the Samaritans (Cowley 1909, 461 l. 26 f. transl. Dexinger 1995, 63):

Pardon and mercy are spread forth
upon you on this great day which the Lord hallowed.
And in it is the door of penitence opened.

Jews connected the closing the door of the Heaven to this day in the *ne'ilah* prayer.

The special offerings and the scapegoat ritual of Lev 16 linked with the purification of the temple in the liturgical texts (Cowley 1909, 488 l. 23) but no ritual or special portion of prayer is associated with them. The Jewish liturgical portion, *Avodah*, plays the role to interpret the sacrifice and forgiveness (Swartz and Yahalom 2005, 2).

There are some parallels between the two liturgies:

Samaritans, like Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, practice an immersion on the afternoon of Yom Kippur, before they go to the Synagogue (Steinman 1975, 103).

Samaritans, like Muslims, always take off their shoes when they enter the synagogue; Jews do it only on Yom Kippur.

Both Samaritans and Jews regard Yom Kippur as a special Sabbath and therefore no work is allowed.

Both Samaritans and Jews emphasize the forgiveness of sins (Macdonald 1963b):

Greatness belongs to Shemma, Who forgives sins and rolls away in his Mercy, so that men can repent. (Tibat Marqah IV. 2)

If the prophet Moses were to pray for us when we were in evil, his prayer Would not be accepted, for the prayer of the righteous on behalf of the Sinner while he is yet in his sin is not efficacious. (Tibat Marqah III. 9)

There is a strong emphasis on the merits of the righteous ones beginning with Moses (Cowley 1909, 491 l. 13–15).

In the description of the Samaritan Yom Kippur by Sir George Grove in 1861 (Grove 1862, 348), visiting the tombs of the ancestors is mentioned. Though it does not belong to the current liturgy, it could have been a custom Samaritans took over from the Jews, since it is written in the Talmud to visit a cemetery on fast days. Accordingly, Sephardim visit the graves on the day before Yom Kippur, the Ashkenazim on the day before Rosh Hashanah (Steinman 1975, 97).

A festive meal takes place after the day is over in both communities.

Summarizing the practical and theological similarities and dissimilarities we can recall Lowy's description of the basic hermeneutical difference between Samaritans and Jews: "the Rabbis admit possible conflicts between rules and make provision to resolve them by means of harmonization. The Samaritans will not even consider such a possibility. . . . they lack any kind of rule or system, and the question exactly when to harmonize is entirely dependent on their living traditions" (Lowy 1977, 473).

DESCRIPTION OF THE LITURGY

Manuscripts of the Samaritan Liturgy are like the Jewish *Mahzor* in that they contain only the text of the liturgy in several variants but not the description of the whole event. This is the case for Yom Kippur as well.

In 1862 Francis Galton published the travelogue of Sir George Grove who visited Mount Gerizim in the previous year on the Day of Atonement. He made a detailed description of the celebration of this holy day (Grove 1862). It seems to be the only eyewitness description of this festival by a western visitor. Unfortunately it is too long to cite here, therefore the condensation of his report made by J.E.H. Thomson is presented (Thomson 1919, 133–135):

On the afternoon of the 9th of tishri—the day preceding the great day of atonement—every member of the Samaritan community solemnly bathes in running water. Thereafter they all partake of a meal which must be finished half an hour before sunset. From that time till after sunset the following day, neither food nor drink may be partaken of.

Even infants have to share in this rigid fast; neither age nor sickness procures exemption. Half an hour before sunset, the whole body of the Samaritan community assembles in the synagogue and begins the recitation of the law. Throughout the whole night, in total darkness, proceeds

this recitation, partly spoken, partly chanted, amid great excitement. The recitation of the law is mingled with liturgic prayers and penitential hymns. In early morning the worshippers form a procession to visit the tombs of their prophets Tombs in the neighborhood of Nablus are assigned to Joseph, Eleazar, Ithamar, Phinehas, Joshua, Caleb, and the seventy elders, especially prominent among these being Eldad and Medad. On the morning of the Day of Atonement these tombs are visited, and something like worship is offered at each tomb to the saint who slumbers beneath. About noon they return to the synagogue and resume the recitation of the law. When the afternoon is well gone, and the last chapters of Deuteronomy have been recited with appropriate prayers, there comes the concluding solemnity of the day—the exhibition of the law. The two priests who have been reciting the law alternately now go behind the veil which, as mentioned above, hangs before the sacred recess, and bring out the two oldest copies of the law in their wrappings of light blue velvet, embroidered with texts from the law in Samaritan characters. These are opened out and the silver cases in which they are enclosed are seen. These in turn are thrown open and the venerable rolls are revealed. The priests take them out and hold them up to view, then all the congregation prostrate themselves with prayers and Hymns. After some time spent in repeated prostrations, the people press forward to touch, to stroke, or even in favored circumstances to kiss the sacred roll. When these rolls are replaced in their coverings, the liturgy of prayer and chanting continues till after sunset; then the solemnity of kippur, or, as the Samaritans pronounce it, kibburim, is ended . . .

If we compare it with the description given by Benjamim Tsedaka in 2011 on the Day of Atonement in 2010, there are some differences:

Most of the praises are attached to the Day of Atonement, which is the ultimate Sabbath and festival. It is the crowning festival of grace. He who afflicts his soul with total resolve is considered as one who has been reborn. On this day, the whole congregation will stand from one evening to the next in prayer and will read God's Torah. This is the day when the shofar [the ram's horn] will be sounded for Israel and freedom will be attained in the struggle with sin. This day is the king of festivals and the day on which forgiveness radiates. The fast of this day applies to every individual, from infants, who have been weaned of their mothers' milk to the long-lived grandfather. For whatever person shall not be afflicted on that same day, he shall be cut off from his people [Lev 23:29].

The fasting is must from sunset to sunset by all ages male and female since the child is weaned from his mother's milk. 25 hours of fasting. Nobody missing. Ill persons prefer to fast with a hope that they will be healed by the fasting.

The prayer never stopped from the beginning one hour before sunset to the next sunset, contains the most ancient layer of reading of the Torah [Genesis and Exodus during the night and Leviticus, Numbers

and Deuteronomy during the daylight] and the most ancient hymns. All hymns written by 'Amram Dareh [3rd century CE] and his son Marqeh that considered as the greatest sage of the Israelite Samaritans, and all hymns composed by poets of the 11th–20th centuries. The High Priest will read the blessings of Priests before the worshipers at the end of the fasting. The voice of the Shofar will mark the beginning and the end of the fasting.

The prayer service is conducted without interruption from one evening to the next. The women of the congregation and their daughters must remember in the evening and throughout the course of the day to help their younger children to endure the fast until the arrival of the reward at the end of the day, i.e., the great and sumptuous feast. Immediately afterwards, preparations are begun for the Harvest Festival [Succoth].

During these 150 years the custom of the visit to the prophet's tombs disappeared, but there are two "new" elements: the blessing of the Priests is read by the High priest at the end of the service and the *shofar* is blown at the beginning and the end of the fast. Some points in the practice were modified and new hymns were composed. The Samaritan liturgy seems to be a very stable and strict practice and literature but at the same time it is flexible enough to accommodate the changing tastes of modern Samaritans.

SUMMARY

Concerning the wide variety of scale of liturgy among the Jews Sidney Steinman wrote:

The wide variety of practices, from the forms and usage of prayers to the actual word content of each prayer, is indicative of the differing cultures and influences among all Jewish communities. (Steinman 1975, 96)

On the contrary, as it was noted first by Cowley (Cowley 1909, x–xi) and later demonstrated by Macdonald (Macdonald 1963) on the basis of the extant manuscripts, Samaritan liturgical tradition seems to be constant and unified since the 14th century. The actual use of hymns is dependent on the leader of the liturgy, but the *Qatafs* and liturgical units have their standard places in the service. It could be the result of the relative small number of Samaritan communities and members, and restricted human and material resources for producing a wider variety of liturgical tradition on the one hand, and the closer relationship between the Diaspora communities and the centre where the high priest lived, on the other. Although a development of this liturgy can be followed.

In its earliest phase after the destruction of their temple, Samaritan Yom Kippur liturgy—as Cowley observed generally about the liturgical literature of the Samaritans—“consisted of passages of the Law almost exclusively” (Cowley 1895, 122). We have no information about the synagogal service of the Samaritans of this time. The first and foremost Aramaic liturgical compositions of Yom Kippur were created during and after the liturgical reform of the 3rd–4th century CE. The political and religious changes of this period, the transformation of Judaism and the accumulating influence of Christianity had an impact on the Samaritan liturgical works. The *Defter*, the first liturgical collection, was expanded during 11th–13th century under Muslim rule and influence. It had portions devoted specially to the Yom Kippur festival. In the 14th century separate holy day liturgies were collected among them a Yom Kippur liturgy. It was continuously supplemented by compositions foremost during the Mamluks and Ottomans, but also during Brits and nowadays Israelis.

As a conclusion of our survey of the Samaritan Yom Kippur liturgical texts and practice, we can pronounce that Samaritans did not make imagery substitutions of the ritual elements of the practice prescribed in the Torah, but concentrate on the theological core of the Day of Atonement. During the whole ten day complex, the festival of the First Day of the Seventh Month (*moed hadash hashevi'i*), the Ten Days of Repentance (*aseret yemei teshuvah*) and Yom Kippur a spiritual meeting is prepared. The recitation of the whole Torah, which is the entire Scripture of the Samaritans, and the praises of God in the prayers and hymns make Yom Kippur a personal meeting with God who gives forgiveness of the sins of yesterday and tomorrow.

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