

Reproduced from the Library of the Editor of
www.theSamaritanUpdate.com

Copyright 2010

The Nation

A Weekly Journal

Devoted To

Politics, Literature, Science, and Art

Volume XXI

New York 1875

(p. 406)

Fragments of a Samaritan Targum. Edited from a Bodleian MS, with an Introduction containing a Sketch of Samaritan History, Dogma, and Literature, by John W. Nutt, M A., Fellow of All Souls' College, etc. (London : Trubner & Co.)—The existence of Samaritans at the present day deserves to be counted among the curiosities of history. A scanty remnant —barely more than one hundred souls—they still inhabit the ancient town of Shechem (now Nablus), which was first settled by their ancestors more than two thousand years ago. They have outlived the persecutions of Jews, pagans, Christians, and Mohammedans. They continue to observe many of the ordinances of Moses's law which have fallen into disuse elsewhere. And the certainty of their approaching extinction lends an additional interest to a people whose early fortunes form a conspicuous link in the chain of Old-Testament history, and whose name has become a proverb through the parable of Jesus. Dr. Petermann, in his 'Reisen im Orient,' gives an interesting account of their rites and usages. The law of Leviticus xii., ordaining the separation of women after childbirth for thirty-three or sixty-six days, is still rigidly enforced. Twice in the year, sixty days before Passover, and sixty before Tabernacles, the priest receives the Terumah or heave-offering, while year by year the Paschal lamb continues to be sacrificed on Mount Gerizim. Petermann, observing that their women were generally without ear-rings, was informed that the use of these ornaments had been prohibited, because employed by Aaron in the fabrication of the golden calf. To Gerizim, their sacred hill, the chief events of the Biblical narrative, at least in its earlier parts, are referred. On or about it was the seat of Paradise, here Adam built his first altar, here the ark rested, here Abraham attempted the sacrifice of his son. Nor has it lost its importance in their eyes even at the present day. In 1838 they expected a great revolution to occur on earth, when dynasties were to be overthrown, and new empires to rise. Then, after an interval of ten years, the ruling sovereigns would assemble the wisest men of the earth in order to determine the true faith. Among these the Taeb (the Messiah of the Samaritans) would appear, convince them of his God-given mission, and lead the nations back to Gerizim. The vessels of the Temple would then be restored, the manna discovered, etc.

The attempt of the Samaritans to monopolize the consecrated spots of the religious past was dictated by jealousy of the Jews, themselves the successors and, to some extent at least, the heirs of the lost Ten Tribes, they claimed to be the true Israel, the only faithful guardians of the Law of God, which they asserted had been falsified in Judea. They never recognized the Prophets and Hagiographa as canonical books. The Pentateuch, however, they have always held in great veneration. Indeed, their reverence for the books of Moses was 'so great as to extend even to the character in which they were written. When the more archaic Hebrew character was abandoned among the Jews, it was preserved in the scrolls of the Samaritans, and, being thus transmitted to our own day, has served to interest scholars in their literature. But the pious zeal with which the Samaritans guarded the written form did not ensure them against forgetting its meaning. The language of the Law soon ceased to be understood among the vulgar, and it was found necessary to translate it into the Samaritan dialect.

Probably in the third century A.D., at or about the same time that the Chaldaic version (Targum) of Onkelos was fixed within Jewish circles, the Samaritan Targum was written down. To Mr. Nutt we are now indebted for the publication of a fragment of this Targum, from a MS. in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, older than either the Barberini or Vatican MS. at Rome. It embraces the end of Leviticus from chap. xxv. 20, and the Book of Numbers, with considerable breaks in various places. "It is to this Targum," says Mr. Nutt, "that recourse must principally be had for settling the forms of the Samaritan language. . . . It is of considerable importance, therefore, that we should possess a thoroughly critical edition of the text, and it is as a contribution to this end that the present fragment has been edited." 152 pages of the book are devoted to an introduction on the history, doctrines, and literature of the Samaritans. In the second part, the connection shown to subsist between Samaritans, Sadducees, and Karaites will be found of special interest. An account of the Hebrew Samaritan Pentateuch, the Targum, the Samaritan-Greek version, the Arabic version of Abu Said, the Samaritan Chronicles, etc., is given in the third part. The whole essay is a complete and careful reproduction of the results of Samaritan research, which are presented with singular clearness and accuracy. Perhaps the statement on p. 19, concerning the lighting of sham beacon-fires by the Samaritans, should be received with some caution. On comparing the source from which this statement is drawn with collateral passages of the Talmud, it appears to us more likely that the term "Cuthim" is employed in the instance referred to as a disguise, and that the sectaries referred to are in reality the early Christians.

The value of the volume is enhanced by two appendices. The former contains an account of the Firkovitch collection of Samaritan MSS. at St. Petersburg by Dr. Harkavy. The enthusiasm with which these treasures are announced would be more cordially appreciated if grave suspicions had not lately fallen on the genuineness of some of Firkovitch's discoveries. The second appendix embodies an English rendering of the 'Tract on the Samaritans.' We are glad to notice that the Introduction to the Targum is also to be sold separately. The interest of the

latter appeals solely to the narrow circle of Semitic scholars. The former may be read with profit by all who are interested in the phenomena of religious history.

Note from this Editor of the SamaritanUpdate.com

This book is referenced # *has not been mentioned* in ***A Bibliography of the Samaritans, Third Edition, Revised, Expanded, and Annotated***, by **Alan David Crown** and **Reinhard Pummer**, ATLA Bibliography, No. 51, **The Scarecrow Press, Inc.** Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Oxford. 2005