

# THE ABISHA SCROLL OF THE SAMARITANS

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THE Samaritan scroll of the Torah, known as the Abisha scroll, has been the subject of a number of investigations. Ever since it aroused the interests of western scholars, attempts have been made to examine it and to publish an accurate version of the chronogram or *Tashqil*<sup>1</sup> which is worked in between Deuteronomy vi. 10 and Deuteronomy xiii. 9. Statements in Samaritan sources about its origin have been investigated and palaeographical investigations have been undertaken to enable conclusions about its age to be drawn.<sup>2</sup> It might seem that, without fresh evidence, the last word had been said. Yet, careful consideration of the conclusions by different scholars shows no harmony or agreement between them other than that we are indeed confronted with an old scroll or a remnant thereof. Moses Gaster<sup>3</sup> argued that the Abisha scroll was to be dated to the first century A.D. Kahle<sup>4</sup> argued first for a date in the fourteenth century, and then for an earlier date by "several centuries".<sup>5</sup> Castro<sup>6</sup> agreed with Kahle that only a portion of the old manuscript was preserved and the rest was extensively rewritten. He placed the later material in the fourteenth century and the earlier text in the thirteenth or twelfth centuries A.D. In his second and larger work on the subject<sup>7</sup> he came to the conclusion that the scribe, Abisha, had merely dropped a figure of three thousand from the date. This gave him a reasonably precise date for the

<sup>1</sup> The best surveys of the literature currently available are in F. Pérez Castro, *Séfer Abiša'* (=SA), Madrid, 1959, and Y. Ben Zvi, *Sefer Hashomronim* (=SH), Jerusalem (revised edn.), 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., and see P. Kahle, "The Abisha Scroll of the Samaritans" in *Studii Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen*, pp. 188-92 (=PF).

<sup>3</sup> M. Gaster, *The Samaritans* (Schweich Lectures for 1923), London 1925, p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> P. Kahle, "Aus der Geschichte der ältesten hebräischen Bibelhandschrift", Beihefte to *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 33 (1918), pp. 247-60.

<sup>5</sup> PF, p. 102.

<sup>6</sup> F. Pérez Castro, "E. Séfer Abiša'", *Sefarad*, xiii (1953), 119-29.

<sup>7</sup> 1959 publication, op. cit.

scroll of A.D. 1045.<sup>1</sup> There is little likelihood that Castro has hit on the correct formula for dating, but we must return to this subject later. Ben Zvi<sup>2</sup> believed that the scroll was somewhat older than the time of Pinḥas ben Joseph, A.D. 1308–62.

Robertson<sup>3</sup> recognized that not only was the scroll written by a number of hands but that these might not have been part of a process of correction and preservation. On the contrary the scroll might have been a compilation put together by a compiler using fragments of various ages. Robertson analysed the way the sections were put together in drawing this conclusion, and he stated his belief that the scroll was a deliberate fabrication. Robertson's argument has some innate errors of detail, in that the chronogram was probably essential to the fabrication of the scroll, and therefore the stratum of the scroll he ascribes to "the compiler" should also include the section denoted II, i.e. a second stratum. Essentially, however, there can be no doubt that Robertson is correct and that the "Abisha Scroll" is not to be regarded as a unitary work, but as a manuscript assemblage of fragments of various ages. The term "Abisha Scroll" in this discussion is used of the work as it appeared in its final assembly.

Since these investigations were published, a good deal of work has been done in the Samaritan field, and some of this throws new light on the whole problem of the Abisha scroll. There is also some additional manuscript evidence (see below) which warrants reopening the subject. In any event, investigation of the scroll has been concerned primarily with its age, but the purpose for which the scroll was written has barely been considered. Was the *Tashqil* intended to claim authorship by Abisha, the great grandson of Aaron, or was this a simple error, as claimed by Castro? Was Abisha for some reason an ideal eponym or was there some other hidden purpose in the chronogram? These are primary questions, but they have scarcely been considered beyond the unsupported suggestion offered by Ben Zvi that this eponymous claim was an anti-Jewish polemic. Let

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. xlvi.

<sup>2</sup> Op cit. p. 242.

<sup>3</sup> E. Robertson, review of F. Pérez Castro's *SA*, in *Vetus Testamentum*, xii (1962), 228–35 (hereafter, Review).

us consider what is known about the scroll and the chronogram as a basis for further examination.

Kahle<sup>1</sup> has shown that the first reference to the Abisha scroll in a Samaritan source is in a manuscript of the Tolidah, dated to the year 1346. However, the reference to the scroll is in a marginal annotation, attached to the name of Abisha, in the text itself.<sup>2</sup> The marginal annotation could date from any subsequent period, but Kahle has taken it to be in “the first half of the fourteenth century”, i.e., within four years of the composition of the scroll, though he had no evidence to support this conclusion. The marginal note refers to the fact that the scroll was partially destroyed by a freak storm and it is now known that only a fraction of the original scroll has been preserved and the rest is mended and repaired.<sup>3</sup> Castro detects at least eight hands involved in the correction<sup>4</sup> and repair, one of which, at least, we can now date precisely.<sup>5</sup> Robertson seems to identify nine hands.<sup>6</sup>

A second Samaritan source is Abu'l Fath's Chronicle,<sup>7</sup> which was not written until A.D. 1355.<sup>8</sup> Since Abu'l Fath's work was

<sup>1</sup> *PF*, op cit.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 190–1. Cf., also *SH*, pp. 236–7. Ben Zvi's statement is rather confused. He claims to have used the Bodley manuscript of the Tolidah, apparently, from his note 7, the same manuscript as used by Neubauer, for his publication of the Tolidah [= A. Neubauer, “Chronique Samaritaine suivie d'un Appendice”, *Journal Asiatique*, xiv (1869), 385–470]. Ben Zvi says that this manuscript was composed in A.H. 544 = A.D. 1346 [sic].

<sup>3</sup> See the photographs in *SA* and Castro's description of the state of the text.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. xxxiv–xxxv.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. E. Robertson, “Notes and Extracts from the Semitic Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library, I. Concerning the Abisha Scroll”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, xix (1935), 22. Despite the fact that the scroll was compiled with “scissors and paste”, as it were, in later generations when it was well established as an object of veneration, some corrections were made to the text.

<sup>6</sup> *Review*, op. cit. p. 233.

<sup>7</sup> Abu'l Fath's Chronicle (= *AF*) was published by E. Vilmar, *Abulfathi Annales Samaritani* (Gotha, 1865); a new edition and translation, based on more manuscripts, is in preparation by my student Paul Stenhouse. Note that Ben Zvi, *SH*, claimed to have quoted (pp. 235–6) a Hebrew translation of Abu'l Fath appearing in R. Kirchheim, *Carme Shomron* (Frankfurt, 1851). It does not, however, appear there at all.

<sup>8</sup> Abu'l Fath only began to write after being importuned by the Priest Pinḥas several times. The work was begun in A.H. 756 (A.D. 1355) and, on his own statement, was finished in the same year, A.H. 756. Robertson (*Review*, p. 235) suggested that Abu'l Fath may have been the “father” of this scroll.

extended by later editors to take it down beyond the time of his death—in fact until the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup>—there is no certainty that the passage dealing with the Abisha scroll's finding is original, though it is most likely to be so since it is to be found in all the manuscripts, and it may be that Abu'l Fath's chronicle was related to the discovery of the scroll (see below).

There are no other published Samaritan sources of like antiquity which mention the Abisha scroll by name. The Book of Joshua published by Juynboll which was "composed" c. A.D. 1250,<sup>2</sup> has no indication at all of the existence of the Abisha scroll. In the light of this, and in the light of the fact that the reference in the Tolidah is a marginal annotation, we are obliged to accept Abu'l Fath's word<sup>3</sup> that the Abisha scroll was unknown to those who preceded Pinhas ben Joseph as High Priest, and that it was discovered in A.D. 1355, the year in which he composed his history.

Was the scroll in existence before its (re-)discovery on *Simḥat Torah* A.D. 1355, or was it specially written for that occasion? Whatever our suspicions on the matter, the prime consideration in attempting to establish the truth must be whether the *Tashqil* inadvertently dropped the figure of three thousand years, as Castro has maintained (see above), or whether there was a deliberate attempt to pass off the scroll as an ancient work. In this evaluation we must consider the possible purposes of such an attempt.

That the Abisha scroll has nothing like the antiquity claimed for it is shown by two factors. The first is that it is written in a Samaritan script which is of relatively late development. Purvis<sup>4</sup> has shown that the direct parentage of the Samaritan script was the palaeo-Hebrew of the Hasmonean period, but that the ultimate ancestor was the cursive Hebrew script of the sixth

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *AF*, pp. vi-xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. my "New Light on the Inter-relationships of Samaritan Chronicles from some Manuscripts in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester", in *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 1v (1972-73), p. 6 and n. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *AF*, pp. 30-32. A translation is found in Robertson, *op. cit.* pp. 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> J. D. Purvis, *The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Origin of the Samaritan Sect* (Harvard, 1968), "Conclusions", p. 50 f.

century B.C. It is quite apparent on this ground alone that the Abisha scroll cannot be of the antiquity claimed for it. Birnbaum<sup>1</sup> has attempted to date the Abisha scroll on palaeographical grounds. He was apparently unaware of Castro's work when he wrote the body of the text, for he summarizes Castro's work from the *Sefer Abišā'* in a footnote.<sup>2</sup> This is not an unfortunate circumstance since it allows us to see two approaches to the epigraphic evidence. The first, that of Birnbaum, is strictly concerned with palaeography. The second, Castro's approach, deals not so much with the palaeography as with the structure—Masorah of the manuscript. Unfortunately, neither scholar referred to the work of Robertson<sup>3</sup> who, if one judges from his two catalogue volumes, had a wide and specialized acquaintance with Samaritan manuscripts.

Birnbaum published a plate of the scroll<sup>4</sup> which is undoubtedly from the part which was regarded by Castro as the oldest section, as can be seen from a comparison of the right hand column of the plate with Castro's plate VII. However, it should be noted that Robertson<sup>5</sup> did not regard this section of the work as the oldest part, even though it contained the chronogram. Robertson suggested that columns 21–43, 88–92, and part of 93, were older than columns 109–26. However, since it is this section (Robertson's section II) which contained the chronogram, we may legitimately consider Birnbaum's argument as relating to the "Abisha Scroll" as a final assembly of manuscript fragments, even though Birnbaum did not consider this problem at all. Birnbaum's final conclusion is that the date "cannot be far from the twelfth century",<sup>6</sup> but such is the uncertain state of Samaritan palaeographical studies that he was forced to exhibit a large degree of leeway for many of the letters, from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, and, in the absence of comparative material was constrained to rely on an averaging procedure. Birnbaum's palaeographical dating must be challenged on

<sup>1</sup> N. Birnbaum, *The Hebrew Scripts* (= *HS*), 2 vols., London, 1954–7.

<sup>2</sup> *HS*, pp. 117–18, n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> E. Robertson, *Catalogue of the Samaritan MSS. in the John Rylands Library, Manchester* (= *CJRL*), Manchester, vol. 1, 1938, Vol. 2. 1962.

<sup>4</sup> *HS*, ii, plate 70.

<sup>5</sup> Review.

<sup>6</sup> *HS*, i, p. 116.

methodological grounds. In the first place his sample was too small. He used five examples of manuscript majuscule hand,<sup>1</sup> ranging from the eighth to the sixteenth centuries A.D., with no specimens from the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, two of his samples being from the twelfth century. Yet, Samaritan majuscule continued to be used side by side with the minuscule until the eighteenth century A.D. for Pentateuch manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, one must consider Robertson's caution that "Palaeography, so useful in the case of most scripts, is unfortunately in this matter of little help. The Samaritan majuscule script was from very early times so stereotyped that no great variation from precise form appears to have occurred. Individuality is shown occasionally in the shaping of a few characters, such as the loop heads of the Samaritan *B* and *R* and, in the formation of the *S* (amech) and *L*, but generally it is confined to the angle of slope of writing".<sup>3</sup> Of the letters which are regarded by Robertson as critical, Birnbaum gives the following conflicting information: *Sm* (Samech) and *R* are regarded as being close to the twelfth century, "and might be ascribed to the eleventh century" (p. 117, line 1), "two features *Sm*, *R*-point to the . . . eighth century" (p. 117, lines 3-4). *B* is ignored in his summary (p. 116) and *L* is either discussed twice (p. 116) or there is a misprint (not noted in the errata) confusing *L* for *Z* (which appears in the summary but not in the discussion). One must also consider the possibility mooted by Gaster,<sup>4</sup> that scrolls of the Law were written not only with great accuracy but with greater calligraphic care, which factor could affect palaeographic discussion. This would certainly seem to be the tenor of Gaster's comment that, "The heavy and large type of the Book form, of which I have specimens at least as old as those of the British Museum of the XIIth century, prove nothing against the finer writing of the scroll".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *HS*, ii, plates 70-74.

<sup>2</sup> *CJRL*, i. xxiv-xxv, and Review.

<sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> M. Gaster, "A Samaritan Scroll of the Hebrew Pentateuch" (= *HP*), *Society of Biblical Archaeology*, 1900, pp. 240-69. Castro apparently used the 1901 reprint which included an article on Hebrew illuminated manuscripts. Whether a photograph of the scroll was included in the reprint I am unable to say.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 247-8.

Sixdenier<sup>1</sup> has also pointed to our inadequate progress in Samaritan palaeography and has made some attempts to bridge the gaps by working from published plates. Unfortunately, since his description is entirely non-visual it quite defeats its purpose, for only a carefully illustrated visual system can contribute to palaeographical progress. In the light of this, until further work is done on Samaritan palaeography, we must set aside Birnbaum's results as inconclusive and of doubtful value.

Castro relied on the punctuation marks<sup>2</sup> and the general appearance of the arrangement on the page column of the manuscript<sup>3</sup> for his judgement that it was old. The date (eleventh century) he reached by comparison with a manuscript *described* by Gaster, but of which, so far as I am aware, no illustration was published.<sup>4</sup> This comparison was supplemented by his theory of the dropping of three thousand years from the chronogram.

Castro observed that the bulk of what he regarded as the oldest part of the scroll used only the simplest of punctuation signs for the *qiṣṣah* (end of a paragraph), namely the colon = *afsaq*, whereas other hands detectable in the scroll used more complex signs. He deduced that since punctuation signs develop in complexity in Samaritan copying, the more complex the sign the younger the work. Therefore, a simple *afsaq* at the *qiṣṣah* points to an older work. The work with which Castro compared the Abisha Scroll to reach his dating was the scroll described by Gaster,<sup>5</sup> which was also undated. This had been ascribed to the eleventh century by Gaster on the basis of criteria which had led him to date the Abisha Scroll to the first century A.D.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the referent used by Castro for his dating was itself of rather uncertain date.

<sup>1</sup> G. D. Sixdenier, "Remarques sur la paléographie samaritaine", *Journal Asiatique*, 1960, pp. 189-96.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *SA*, p. xxxvi. Castro, as Robertson (Review) noted, was undoubtedly correct in using the punctuation marks for isolating the different scribes in the scroll. Beyond this determination, as is shown below, there were dangers in the procedure.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> See p. 41, n. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Castro does not seem to have been aware of the large number of dated scrolls described by Ben Zvi in his various articles and in *SH*.

<sup>6</sup> *Supra*, p. 36, n. 3.

In any event, the use of punctuation complexity as the principal criterion of dating is dangerous. Kahle<sup>1</sup> explained that the Samaritan punctuation system, described in notes at the end of some Samaritan Bibles, is older than the tenth century, but that it was so inconsistently and casually applied, with very few scribes placing it carefully and regularly, that "one should only attempt conclusions from a study of the use of signs in manuscripts where care has been taken in setting down these signs".<sup>2</sup> Apparent substantiation of Kahle's view is found from the facsimile of Codex Watson II published as a plate in Montgomery.<sup>3</sup> If, indeed, this codex is of the age claimed for it,<sup>4</sup> i.e. of 35 A.H., then there is evidence here of the triple dot *qiṣṣah* with additional marks. In fact, the section determined by Robertson<sup>5</sup> as the oldest part of the scroll, has a more complex finial than the section with the simple *afsaq*. It is not age, apparently, which governs the use of the diacritical signs, but the care exercised by the scribe.

There is also another factor to be considered. Did the nature of the manuscript, whether it was a sacred scroll or a manuscript for non-religious use, make a difference in the nature of the diacritical points used? Gaster<sup>6</sup> was concerned to show the differences between the scroll and the book in the Samaritan tradition, suggesting that the Samaritan scroll in many respects showed developments in its Massoretic *form* parallel to those in the Jewish scrolls. One of these developments was a tendency to use the diacritical points sparingly. Since, in the Jewish tradition, punctuation in Torah scrolls dropped out of use entirely,<sup>7</sup> there may have been a parallel reluctance to use

<sup>1</sup> P. Kahle, "Die Lesezeichen bei den Samaritanern", *Opera Minora*, pp. 167-79.

<sup>2</sup> My own translation. Cf. also, S. Talmon, "Some Unrecorded Fragments of the Hebrew Pentateuch in the Samaritan Version", *Textus*, 1963, pp. 60-73, who analyses the situation a little more fully, to reach the same conclusions. Talmon does say that "the more intricate the finalia, the younger the manuscript".

<sup>3</sup> J. A. Montgomery, *The Samaritans* (Philadelphia, 1907), facing p. 288.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. Gottheil, "Dating of Their Manuscripts by the Samaritans," *J.B.L.*, xv (1906), 29, and 31 n. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Review, p. 233.

<sup>6</sup> *HP*, pp. 246-54 especially.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *HP*, p. 253, for evidence that punctuation was used at one time in Jewish Torah scrolls.

punctuation in Samaritan scrolls. There is no doubt that in codices, whether of the Pentateuch or of the liturgy, scribal inconsistency apart, there is a definite tendency to development in the use of punctuation marks.<sup>1</sup> But, without adequate studies of the situation in Samaritan Torah scrolls we must be cautious of drawing conclusions from the appearance of these punctuation marks.

Robertson<sup>2</sup> in his Catalogue (supplemented in his "Review")<sup>3</sup> laid down certain criteria of "Massoretic form" by which to judge the comparative age of a Samaritan manuscript, though these criteria are not adequate for determining absolute age. When these criteria were applied to the different portions of the Abisha Scroll, they led Robertson to slightly different conclusions as to the comparative age of the different strands of the scroll.<sup>4</sup> It is with the portion of the scroll containing the chronogram that we are primarily concerned here, since the chronogram represents the state of "final assembly" of the fragments. When these criteria are applied to this section we are led to conclusions about the age of the scroll which are rather different from the conclusions reached by Castro. Certainly a date in the eleventh century for this part of the scroll—hence of the whole scroll—cannot be sustained. These criteria are as follows:

(1) The use of a separator dot (p. xxv). Robertson maintains that the dot is not placed after a word which finishes a line in manuscripts of relatively recent date. "Consequently, a manuscript with the dot in that place may be held to be earlier than one from which it is absent" (p. xxvi). An examination of the plates of the Abisha scroll published by Castro shows that the separator dot is consistently used, but never appears at the end of a line, though it does occasionally appear at the end of the line in the right hand column of a double-column sheet (plate xxiii). The colon (*afsaq*) does appear at the end of the line.

(2) Punctuation. This factor was considered above.

(3) Vocalization marks. As (2) above.

(4) The writing of the tetragrammaton at the end of a line.

<sup>1</sup> Robertson, *CJRL*, p. xxvi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* Cf. also Talmon, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> *Review.*

Separation of the letters of the tetragrammaton at the end of a line to meet the requirements of symmetry must be deemed to be early (pp. xxvi–xxvii). The tetragrammaton in the Abisha scroll is not divided even in the oldest parts of the scroll. On the contrary, where the tetragrammaton ends a line, rather than separate the letters the line is left short, i.e. the tetragrammaton is retracted from the margin : so plate 9, lines 16, 22 ; plate 14, line 18 ; plate 16, line 54. These are the only short lines. In all other instances letters are separated for the sake of symmetry.

(5) Robertson shows (p. xxvii) that symmetry of the manuscript was obtained by squaring the line with either one letter detached from the word, with an intervening white space, or with two such letters. To this we should add manipulation of a whole word by separating all its letters. Robertson called these techniques the “one letter” or “two letter” methods. He suggested that the “one letter” manuscript was older than the “two letter” manuscript.

The older parts of the Abisha scroll do not follow any pattern exclusively. Sometimes the “one letter” pattern is used, but, more frequently, two letters are used to even out the margin. The most striking example of this is plate xx, line 43, but on all other plates there are examples. On plate xvii there are examples in lines 8, 15, 19, 26, 59, 60. It would seem, then, that the Abisha scroll exhibits late manifestations in its movement towards the “two letter” symmetry.

(6) The Samaritan scribes made a practice of concluding each page with a syntactical pause, even if to achieve this they had to add at the foot of the page a line or part line above the prescribed number (p. xxii). The earlier scribes were not so particular, but the later scribes were more careful to reproduce this phenomenon (p. xxvii). So far as can be determined from the plates, at least those which are complete at the bottom margin, each column ended in a sense pause, and some columns (e.g. xiv, xv) show signs of having been carefully written and spaced to allow for the sense pause at the foot. To these criteria should be added the additional observation of Robertson in his review of Castro’s work<sup>1</sup> that the initial letters of the line are

<sup>1</sup> Review, *op. cit.* pp. 233–4.

detached from the remainder of the word following, a factor which he regards as a later development.

All these features are held to be signs of "lateness", but, as noted, this is a comparative, not a relative, term and some referent is needed if we are to be able to use these criteria for dating. In any case, the development described by Robertson was not always rigid. Later manuscripts could exhibit features that are regarded in his listing as early. In plate 74 of Birnbaum's second volume we see a Samaritan manuscript of the early sixteenth century in which symmetry is achieved by "single letter" format with but a rare "two letter" line. Referents should therefore be regarded as no more than probability indicators rather than as providing positive and certain parallels. Let us attempt to find some points of comparison in order to make it possible to apply Robertson's system to the Abisha Scroll with some chance of success.

The first referent is the published page of codex Watson II (35 A.H.).<sup>1</sup> In this text no apparent attempt has been made to even out the margin of the right hand column, though this uneven form may be influenced by the chronogram. The separating dot is used at the end of some lines of the right hand column, but not at all on the ends of the lines in the left hand column. Marginal symmetry in the left column is achieved by "single letter" movement. Punctuation is more complex than in the portion of the Abisha Scroll discussed, and the "colon" appears inside sections rather than merely at the ends. There is a sense pause at the foot of the page. The tetragrammation does not appear at the end of a line in the left hand column, but in the right hand column is split for use in the chronogram (line 23). The initial letters of the lines are not separated from the word following. From the assemblage of features on this page the Watson codex II would appear to be older than the Abisha Scroll.

The second referent is the so-called "Manchester fragments" = Rylands Samaritan MS. VII, used by Birnbaum as his plate 70, and another leaf of which is shown in the Robertson catalogue. Although Birnbaum used it as a palaeographical source for

<sup>1</sup> Supra and p. 43, n. 3. Watson published more of his Codex, but the article is not available at the time of writing.

dating the Abisha Scroll, it is undated. Robertson, who examined the three leaves of this codex fragment, considered it the oldest of the Samaritan manuscripts in the library (p. xxviii). The separator dot is found at the ends of lines. The colon is used only at the ends of sections with a combination stroke (—:). It is a “one letter” manuscript with a symmetric left margin, and it has no syntactic pause. The initial letters on the lines are not detached from the following word. The letters of the tetragrammaton are separated at the end of line 25 on the leaf shown in the Robertson catalogue.<sup>1</sup> It exhibits all of the features regarded by Robertson as marking a relatively high antiquity, whereas Codex Watson II has but four of those features. If Watson II is indeed to be dated to the seventh century, then Rylands Samaritan MS. VII may be regarded as older, and the eighth-century date ascribed by Birnbaum could be revised accordingly. There can be no doubt that the Abisha Scroll is younger than both these manuscripts, since it shows, on the contrary, an assemblage of later features.

Our third referent is the reproduction of a manuscript published by Birnbaum as his plate 72, which must be dated before A.D. 1149, perhaps c. A.D. 1100.<sup>2</sup> This codex, Birnbaum suggests, is younger than the Abisha Scroll. It is not certain, though, that this must be so. On the folio shown, the separator dot is found twice in one paragraph at the end of a line. The colon is used as frequently as in the Abisha Scroll. There do not appear to be any vocalization marks. It is, if one can judge from the single plate alone, a “one letter” manuscript, but the page ends in a syntactic pause, as do the columns of the Abisha Scroll. The tetragrammaton does not end a line on the plate shown, so we have no basis for comparison. The initial letters are detached from the word following.

Our fourth referent is the Sassoon Scroll written by Shelama ben Abraham b. Joseph in A.D. 1166/7 and published as plate 12 in Gaster<sup>3</sup> and as plate 73 in Birnbaum. There we have a reasonable basis for comparison in that one expects the scroll to follow the same principles of copying, i.e. those principles

<sup>1</sup> See also *CJRL*, p. xxix.

<sup>2</sup> *HS*, 117.

<sup>3</sup> *The Samaritans*.

applicable to Torah scrolls.<sup>1</sup> Though the Abisha Scroll has a fundamental appearance of age, the history of the scroll with a compilation of fragments of various ages and its ordeal by storm<sup>2</sup> may well account for its physical appearance. When one considers both scrolls in the light of the criteria laid down by Robertson *the Abisha Scroll seems to be the younger*. The Sassoon scroll is not consistently a "two letter" symmetric scroll; occasionally a single letter is detached from a word, to square the margin, as in the Abisha Scroll. The separator dot is not found at the end of a line, except where the column is split for the sake of the chronogram, as in the Abisha Scroll. Most important, the tetragrammaton when ending a line is not divided but it is not retracted from the margin (see line 51 on Gaster's plate 12, column 1b) even when there is clearly room to retract the word. The Abisha Scroll clearly retracts the tetragrammaton. This latter is the most telling feature of all those enumerated by Robertson. In the Barberini Triglot (A.D. 1227), of which there is a complete photographic copy in my possession, and in Vatican Samaritan MS. I, a Torah written in A.D. 1344, the tetragrammaton is retracted from the line. The initial letters of the lines are detached from the words following. Thus, the Sassoon scroll possesses four of the features (excluding punctuation marks) enumerated by Robertson as showing relative youth. The Abisha Scroll exhibits five of these features (excluding punctuation marks).

The final referent is Samaritan MS. I of the Vatican, a complete photographic copy of which is in my possession. This manuscript, written by Seth ben Ab-Gelugah ben Zedaqah in A.D. 1344,<sup>3</sup> shows an unusual combination of features and serves

<sup>1</sup> In fact, the two scrolls follow different "massoretic" traditions. The song of Moses, Deut. 32, in the Abisha Scroll, is followed by six links, in common with the practice in Jewish scrolls of the twelfth century. The song is written in forty-three double lines, not following any known standard. In the Sassoon scroll the song is in fifty nine lines, not known in any Soferic tradition. Nevertheless, other forms of uniformity—care in writing, arrangement on the page, and punctuation—may be expected.

<sup>2</sup> *SH*, p. 237.

<sup>3</sup> Allony and Loewinger, *Institute of Hebrew MSS., List of Photocopies in the Institute*, part iii, *Hebrew MSS. in the Vatican* (Jerusalem, 1968), p. 90, no. 797, list the scribe as Abraham ben Zedaqa ben Abraham b. Zedaqa, but the chrono-

as a caution against overreliance on any single system—palaeographic or epigraphic—for dating manuscripts. The majority of pages in the manuscript are exclusively “two letter” pages, with no separating dots at the ends of the lines. Each page of the “two letter” type is concluded with a syntactic pause, the tetragrammaton is never divided and is retracted from the margins. Yet, there are pages with all those features regarded as showing age, the end dot, “one letter” symmetry, and no syntactic pause, at the foot of the page. However, the tetragrammaton is always retracted even on these pages. There are no vocalization marks in the manuscript. The initial letters of lines are often detached from the following words, but this is not consistent from folio to folio.

It is not possible to define with certainty the place of the Abisha Scroll in this series of referents, but it seems probable that it is younger than the Sassoon scroll, and perhaps a little older than Vatican Samaritan MS. I. In any case, once we move towards the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries A.D. for the date of the Abisha portion of the scroll, then we move beyond the possibility of an inadequacy in the chronogram, as postulated by Perez Castro, to a theory of deliberate deception, as suggested by Robertson.

It is as well now to consider the words of the chronogram to see what can be derived therefrom in possible support of the dating adduced above. The *Tashqil*, which is not entirely legible,<sup>1</sup> reads, according to Castro's decipherment:

אני אבישע בן פינחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן להם רצון יהוה וכבודו  
 כתבתי ספר הקדש בפתח אהל מועד בהרג(ר)יזים שנת שלשה עשר  
 למלכות בני ישראל ארץ כנען לכל גבולותיה (ס)ביב אודה את  
 יהוה אמן

Ben Zvi<sup>2</sup> disagrees with Castro by reading the more usual Samaritanism למובא for למלכות,<sup>3</sup> a word which is read as למושב

gram in Genesis begins *ani seth ben ḥaḥimāh ab Gelugah ben Zedaqa ben ḥalaf demin nof Yosef ben Abraham shem ṭe'imah katabti z'ot hatorah haqedosha 'al shem zedaqa bishnat 'arb'a ve 'arba'im veshev'a me'ot lememshellet bene nades . . .*

<sup>1</sup> See the plates in *SA*, and note the discussion in Castro's text and in *SH*, pp. 233–40. The copies of the older photographs available to Robertson seem to have been more legible (Review, p. 230, n. 1).

<sup>2</sup> *SH*, p. 240.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Castro's discussion *SA*, p. xli.

in the Tolidah. It is clear from these alternative readings that not only is the text uncertain at that point but that the word למלכות could have a significance for the dating that was sensed, but not stated, by the various proponents of the disparate readings. There are also alternative readings for אודה, which is read by Abu'l Fath as the Samaritan form אודי.<sup>1</sup> Both Castro and Ben Zvi are agreed that the words בית אל Beth El are not to be found in the *Tashqil* after the name הר גריוזים. Both add the word אמן to the end of the *Tashqil*, an addition not found in any Samaritan source. These factors not only point to the difficulties of reading the chronogram, but, as noted, may indicate other problems. The reading למלכות, if established, would certainly invalidate any claim that the scroll was pre-Islamic. In all the examples of colophons or chronograms to copies of the Torah cited by Von Gall<sup>2</sup> and as noted by Gottheil<sup>3</sup> and Cowley,<sup>4</sup> the words למלכות or לממלכת are used for dates A.H. These words are used in association with a combination of phrases expressing Moslem rule<sup>5</sup> but they are never used of the settlement in Canaan. In Samaritan sources, dates from the settlement in Canaan are given in combination with the words למובא | למושב. If, indeed, the chronogram used the word למלכות, we should have here a clear indication that the text was written in the period when dates A.H. were accustomed to be given,<sup>6</sup> supporting the suggestion of Castro, Cowley and Ben Zvi,<sup>7</sup> that the phrasing להם רצון יהוה וכבודו in the *Tashqil* was also post the Islamic conquest.

In view of the difficulty of reading the *Tashqil*, it is important to consider as many of the published readings as are available in order to try and achieve as firm a reading as possible. Both Ben Zvi and Castro, in their respective works on the subject, considered

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *SA*, p. xvi, and *AF*, p. 37, but see below on the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript of Abu'l Fath.

<sup>2</sup> A. Von Gall, *Der Hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner*, Giessen, 1918.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> A. E. Cowley, "A Supposed Early Copy of the Samaritan Pentateuch", *PEFQS*, 1904, pp. 394-6.

<sup>5</sup> Gottheil, *loc cit.*, presents a list. He misses the combination *bene nades* found in Vatican Samaritan MS. I (cf. p. 43, n. 4 above).

<sup>6</sup> The earliest Samaritan evidence of the use of dates A.H. is in Codex Watson II = 35 A.H.

<sup>7</sup> *SH*, p. 244.

a number of readings, and Castro ultimately contended<sup>1</sup> that the *significant* differences between the versions could be reduced to three points :

(1) The reading, למושב, or למלכות, both of which have supporting evidence, and Ben Zvi's opinion that one should read למובא,<sup>2</sup> which is not supported even though it is a common Samaritan form in other contexts. (2) The supported versions לגבולותיה and לכל גבולותיה, or the unsupported reading by Ben Zvi, כלל גבולותיה, and (3) the unsupported reading by both Castro and Ben Zvi of אמן. Three additional sources can be added to those considered by Castro and Ben Zvi. Two versions of the chronogram are in Samaritan majuscule in their respective sources, as though they were quoted verbatim from the first-hand experience of the scribes; the third is in Samaritan majuscule and Arabic.

The first source is a manuscript in the John Rylands University Library, Samaritan MS. 257, a modern Hebrew copy of an older chronicle,<sup>3</sup> which gives the chronogram with the following variances: for אודי it reads אודה: instead of למלכות or לממלכת it reads למושב: after הר גריזים, it adds בית אל, and omits the words לכל גבולותיה סביב.

The second source is a Hebrew translation of Abu'l Fath, a modern copy in the same Library, Samaritan MS. 256. This source supports both Ben Zvi and Castro by omitting the words בית אל and reading אודי > אודה and סביב לכל גבולותיה סביב. It reads למושב instead of למלכות, but clearly the source is not entirely trustworthy, for it spells the name Abisha' erroneously with ה.

The third version is the reading in the Bibliothèque Nationale MS. of Abu'l Fath (Samaritan MS. 10, A.D. 1523) which was one of the manuscripts used by Vilmar for his edition. This manuscript presents the chronogram in six lines, the second of which is in Arabic and the others in mixed majuscule and cursive scripts. This version is probably the most accurate secondary version available to us.<sup>4</sup> It omits the words בית אל after גריזים

<sup>1</sup> SA, p. xli.

<sup>2</sup> SH, p. 240.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. my "New Light", op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> However cf. Robertson, "Concerning the Abisha Scroll", op. cit. pp. 20-21, for a similar version.

הר, contains the phrase לגבולותיה סביב, and reads אודה instead of אודי, as in the other versions of Abu'l Fath. There is no doubt that the date formula contains the words בני ישראל לממלכת.

This version indicates that the reading אודי in Vilmar's edition of Abu'l Fath is not based on all the manuscripts, and אודה is likely to be the original reading. It does nothing to resolve the dispute over לגבולותיה, but this need not detain us, for, though it is significant, it is a problem which can be resolved by direct examination of the chronogram itself.

With the aid of a strong magnifier it is just possible to reconsider Castro's reading from his published plates, especially plate X.<sup>1</sup> It is not easy to discern the *Tashqil* and for some letters only guesswork is possible. However, it is legible enough to dismiss entirely the reading למובא by Ben Zvi. If one considers Ben Zvi's placing of the necessary letters, in his article in the Mazar Festschrift,<sup>2</sup> it becomes apparent that he is forced to select the ב of מצבתם, line 34, as a letter of the chronogram, when it is in no way separated from the preceding or following letters, and, hence, not part of the *Tashqil*. One can also exclude the reading למושב. The way the lines are broken points definitely to some letters of the *Tashqil*. Especially telling is the word ועל (line 33), when the ל is clearly detached from the rest of the word. Since this letter is either the third or fourth letter of the word, we are able to exclude the reading למושב but we are not able to decide between למלכות or לממלכת, or even לממלכות.<sup>3</sup> The most troublesome letter is *kaph*, whether of לממלכת or למלכות. One line is virtually obliterated, and that is the only line (Deut. xii. 5) which could have supplied a *kaph* (כי אם) for the reading למלכות, the *vav* for which would then be the last letter of שמו in line 36. The other source for the *kaph* could have been the word לשכינו in line 36 but only for the reading לממלכת. In any event, since we can exclude all other alternatives than a variant form of לממלכת, there is clear evidence here that the text is post-Islamic.

<sup>1</sup> One can, in fact, distinguish words which Castro omitted from his transcription as illegible. Thus the words אלהי אבותי on line 30 can be read. On the other hand the details of the chronogram are vague.

<sup>2</sup> I. Ben Zvi, "Sefer Abisha", *Eretz Israel*, v (1958, Mazar volume), pp. 240-52, especially p. 250.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Robertson, "Concerning the Abisha Scroll", p. 11.

There is no doubt whatsoever that some word interposes between כנען and גבלותיה. The line beneath the ל of אלהיך on line 12 of plate xi makes it certain that this marks the end of a word, and the word, most probably, should be read as לכל, the reading determined by Castro.<sup>1</sup> However, the line beneath the ל would exclude the following ל (line 13) in the word כל from being part of the chronogram. It would neither be appropriate as a prefixed preposition with לגבלותיה, nor could it be the last letter of לכל, since in Samaritan chronograms the line falls beneath the last letter of a word, not before it. That this common Samaritan practice is followed in this chronogram is demonstrated by the words אודה את יהוה on the same plate, all of which are followed by the terminal line. Thus, though Castro read the word correctly, in reading the ל of כל on line 13<sup>2</sup> he read the wrong ל.

The reading, לכל גבולותיה סביב is also significant in helping to date the scroll. In seeking to find parallels to the chronogram of the Abisha Scroll, Castro turned to Von Gall's<sup>3</sup> introduction and suggested that the Abisha Scroll's chronogram was parallel to those of manuscripts of the thirteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In fact, there is no exact parallel to be found in the chronograms of any of the manuscripts or scrolls published in Von Gall's introduction. None of these chronograms makes any reference to Mount Gerizim or the borders thereof. There is, however, a parallel *Tashqil* which does refer to Mount Gerizim and its surroundings. This is the *Tashqil* of the Pinhas Scroll, a Torah scroll which had some considerable significance in its day (see below). This *Tashqil* is published by Ben Zvi<sup>5</sup> and reads: אני פינחס בן יוסף בן עזי בן נתנאל בן פינחס בן אלעזר להם ברית הכהנה הגדולה כתבתי את התורה הקדושה שנת ה' אלף וז' מאות וט"ג בהר גריזים וסבבתו לבריאת עלמה אודי את יהוה.

Now this Pinhas ben Joseph was the same priest who persuaded Abu'l Fath to write his annals, and in whose reign as High Priest the Abisha Scroll was discovered. It might well be argued that this parallel chronogram was inspired by the working of the *Tashqil* of the Abisha Scroll. But, in fact, this does not appear to be the case. As noted above, the Abisha Scroll was "discovered"

<sup>1</sup> SA, p. xxxvii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit. cf. pp. i-xc.

<sup>4</sup> SA, p. xlv.

<sup>5</sup> SH, p. 276.

on Simhat Torah A.D. 1355. Pinḥas ben Joseph dates his scroll to 5759 After The Creation. Using the "high chronology" as presented in Robertson's catalogue,<sup>1</sup> A.C. 5759 appears to be the equivalent of A.D. 1445. Since Pinḥas is known to have lived in the fourteenth century and not the fifteenth, the high chronology must be abandoned in favour of the "low chronology", which reduces the date by 113 years.<sup>2</sup> This would indicate that the Pinḥas scroll was written in A.D. 1341, some fourteen years before the discovery of the Abisha Scroll. The same date (A.D. 1341) is reached by using Gaster's chronology,<sup>3</sup> though this date, according to that chronology, sees Pinḥas 6th = (son of Abisha), grandson of Pinḥas ben Joseph, as High Priest. As Gaster noted in his article,<sup>4</sup> the dates here are in error, and we must assume that Pinḥas ben Joseph was on the High Priestly throne. It may well be that here is a clue to the date of the Abisha Scroll, for this form of the chronogram foreshadows, rather than copies, that in the Abisha Scroll. The evidence adduced so far is still rather tenuous, but it all points in the same direction, namely towards a period later than the tenth century, and perhaps to the fourteenth century, for the writing of the scroll.

We must now consider Castro's proposition that the scribe merely dropped a figure from the chronogram, and that the figure dropped was three thousand. Castro wrote,<sup>5</sup> "Bien conocido, es el hecho de que con cierta frecuencia los escribas, tanto orientales como occidentales, al fechar sus obras omiten los miles". Whilst this is certainly true as a general proposition,

<sup>1</sup> *CJRL*, ii. 309-10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> M. Gaster, "The Chain of the Samaritan High Priests", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1909, pp. 393-420 (reprinted in *Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Medieval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha and Samaritan Archaeology* (London, 1925-8), i. 484-502). Note that according to the Chronicle Adler Pinḥas was incumbent as priest for fifty two years. Since he came to the High Priesthood in 5609 he should have died in 5661, but his death is given in Chronicle Adler as in 5665, the same date as given in Gaster, where the *shalshallat* originally also seems to have read 52 years but which was "corrected" by Gaster to 56 years. The discrepancy has doubtless arisen because Pinḥas' son Eleazar came to the High Priestly office whilst his father was still alive. Pinḥas was priest for 52 years but died a few years after his son became High Priest.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 501, n. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *SA*, p. xlvi.

there is not one single example, to my knowledge, in any chronogram of a Samaritan Pentateuch scroll or codex where the thousand figure is dropped. If it were dropped in this case it would be unique and this could scarcely be considered an accident. In any case, Castro presents his reckoning without declaring his chronological framework. He states that the year 3013 after the entry to Canaan is equivalent to A.D. 1045.<sup>1</sup> But in fact this is not so. Using Robertson's chronology,<sup>2</sup> 3013 years after the entry into Canaan is either A.D. 1500 in the high chronology or 1387 in the low chronology; in any case, both dates fall in the period when the scroll was known to be in existence. There is no other chronology, whether following Abu'l Fath, Chronicle Adler, or the Samaritan Chronicle II<sup>3</sup> which would equate 3013 years after the entry into Canaan with an eleventh-century date.

Who was the Abisha who wrote this scroll? Castro presents the hypothesis that he was an eleventh-century scribe with the common name of Abisha ben Pinḥas, of the priestly family, but who is otherwise unknown.<sup>4</sup> This is a proposition not easily acceptable because of the role of the name Pinḥas in validating priestly genealogies and Torah scrolls in Samaritan tradition. Ben Zvi emphasized the importance of the name Pinḥas in the chronograms of Torah scrolls<sup>5</sup> (see below) and it would be a source of considerable surprise to find a *Pinḥasiah*, as Ben Zvi termed such scrolls, which carried a chronogram so cryptic as to be all but anonymous. It is all the less acceptable if we acknowledge Robertson's proposition, noted previously, that the whole scroll is a compilation and "the appropriate cryptogram (*Tashqil*) was devised, either enlarged from a shorter one already there, or superimposed in full on an innocent text".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> *CJRL*, ii. 309-10. A convenient reference is Gaster's "Chain", op. cit., which lists dates after the entry in his third column. Surprisingly, the discrepancy between these figures and Castro's estimate seems to have been overlooked by reviewers. For further detailed discussion see *SH*, y. 224.

<sup>3</sup> For a convenient summary, see the article "Samaritans" in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, 1971.

<sup>4</sup> *SA*, p. xlvi.

<sup>5</sup> *SH*, p. 264.

<sup>6</sup> Review, op. cit. p. 235.

An alternative explanation is put briefly by Von Gall.<sup>1</sup> He drew on Cowley's genealogical list<sup>2</sup> to show that there was a hiatus in the priestly genealogy, when the High priesthood at Shechem was assumed by Ithamar ben Amran, priest at Damascus. The year thirteen, in his opinion, refers to the thirteenth year after this event, i.e. 1218/19. However, we are still constrained to rely on an otherwise unknown kinsman of Ithamar, called Abisha, who wrote the scroll. Von Gall's explanation is not, in the view of this author, a wholly accurate explanation, but it displays a certain prescience, for it points the way to the truth by recognizing that the presentation of the chronograms in the Abisha Scroll was the *raison d'être* of the scroll. If that purpose lay not in the date alone then it lay in some other part of the chronogram, i.e. in some detail or details. That other part of the chronogram could be its emphasis on Mount Gerizim and Shechem, as suggested by Von Gall, or in the priestly lineage of the writer and the fact that the Pinhas lineage was to be the mediator of the future Messianic age. If we cannot accept Von Gall's explanation *in toto* because we are left with an unknown Abisha, we may still consider his viewpoint that, age apart, one segment of the chronogram is significant.

If the date alone were of importance (the Abisha Scroll being given a false antiquity), the reasons which come to mind for emphasizing the age of the scroll are centred on creating priority for this text over all others, either to establish an archetype for the standardization of the genre amongst the Samaritans, or, as observed by Ben Zvi,<sup>3</sup> as a polemical act against the Jews. However, there is no shred of evidence that the Abisha Scroll served any such purpose amongst the Samaritans. When the historical record is considered, there is no evidence that the Abisha Scroll had any archetypal status, especially at a time in Samaritan history when numerous scrolls were being written.

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit. p. liii. For some reason Castro has attributed this view to Cowley (SA, p. xlv). Perhaps he was misled by Von Gall's quotation marks in association with a reference to Cowley and did not realize that Von Gall was translating and not quoting Cowley.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. E. Cowley, *The Samaritan Liturgy* (= SL), 2 vols. (Oxford, 1909), ii, xlv.

<sup>3</sup> SH, p. 233.

Nor is there the slightest hint in any of the polemical literature<sup>1</sup> that the Abisha Scroll, in the era of its discovery, was held up to the Jews as an exemplar of Samaritan antiquity, or that it was ever compared with any of the Jewish scrolls (such as the Scroll of Elijah in Mesopotamia) for which claims of antiquity were made. The archetype theory must be abandoned, and so may also be abandoned any theory relating to polemics against the Jews. We must reconsider the evidence to see what function the Abisha scroll in fact came to serve in Samaritan life, and whether any part of the chronogram facilitated that function. Secondly, we must consider the possibility that if the chronogram did not give priority for the sake of polemic against the Jews, or for the sake of textual standardization, there is some other situation where the priority of this scroll would have had a significant effect in Samaritan life.

In considering this question we must also consider why the name Abisha was thought to be a suitable eponym for a scroll which was fabricated for some purpose as yet undetermined. So long as one is of the opinion, like Von Gall and Castro, that the name Abisha was merely the name of an otherwise unknown scribe/compiler, then the question of priority through antiquity for some purpose unknown is the fundamental consideration in searching for purpose in the fabrication of the scroll. Once some significance is recognized in the name, then we are able to explore other motives for the compilation of the scroll. The name Abisha may well have been that of the scribe and it may well have been this fact that was parent to a plan to exploit the real significance of Abisha's genealogy in Samaritan tradition. Abisha is significant as the son of Pinhas, a name of prime importance in Samaritan tradition (and, as a secondary consideration only, the occasion for polemical comment against the Jews).<sup>2</sup> The whole purpose of the chronogram may have been to emphasize this significance.

Whilst our contemporary scholars speak in general terms of Samaritan "priests", such generalization was not always common

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. S. Halkin, "Samaritan Polemics Against the Jews", *American Academy for Jewish Research*, vii (1935), 13-59.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28/16. (Where a work has been reprinted, the original page reference and the reprint are given).

among the Samaritans. Before the transfer of the priestly office to the Levitical line in the seventeenth century (1623–4) the sense of lineage and family in the Samaritan priesthood was very powerful. Both the *Kītab al-Tabākh* and the *Kītab al-Kāfī*, the two Samaritan halachic treatises of the eleventh century,<sup>1</sup> discuss the priesthood at length. The *Kāfī* gives pride of place to the discussion of the priesthood on the grounds that “Priests are the upholders of the divine law and tradition and they are the judges and spiritual leaders, therefore their rank is the foremost amongst other ranks in the nation and the discourse on them deserves first place in the book”.<sup>2</sup> It is only through the priesthood and its continuity that the Taheb, the Messiah, will ultimately appear. The qualifications for the priesthood are significant for they are (1) proper lineage, i.e. the lineage of Pinḥas ben Eleazar who had been promised the priesthood as a lasting heritage<sup>3</sup>; (2) proper knowledge of God’s Law.<sup>4</sup> This may account for the special importance of the Torah scrolls known as *Pinḥasiah*, since they exemplify the relationship of the priestly line to the Law. The name Abisha, then, in the chronogram, was probably of significance in that it validated the scroll as a *Pinḥasiah*, and emphasized the genealogy of some individual called Pinḥas in the priestly office to stress his name, and perhaps even underscore his role as Messianic mediator.

Doubtless, we can pinpoint who this Pinḥas was. Robertson<sup>5</sup> indicted Abu’l Fath as the “father of the scroll”, but it was his master Pinḥas ben Joseph who, with his son Abisha, were the culprits. As soon as it is agreed that the fabrication of the scroll was indeed done with some purpose beyond whimsy, then we can look for the “*dramatis personae*” of the fabrication close to the time when the scroll was found. For, once the fabrication of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. D. M. ‘Abd ‘al-‘al, *A Comparative Study of the Unedited Work of Abu’l Hasan Al Sūrī and Yusuf ibn Salamah* (Leeds, 1957: Ph.D. dissertation) and S. Noja, *Il Kitāb al-Kāfī dei Samaritani*, (Naples, 1970). Both present convenient translations of the *Kāfī* into Italian or English.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Abd ‘al-‘al, op. cit. p. 118; Noja, op. cit. p. 13/265.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Abd ‘al-‘al, op. cit. pp. 115, 119, 123; Noja, op. cit. p. 13/265. Cf. also Halkin, op. cit. p. 28/16.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Abd ‘al-‘al, op. cit. p. 119; Noja, op. cit. p. 14/266.

<sup>5</sup> Review, op. cit. p. 235.

scroll became of tactical utility in the priestly politics of the era, then no purpose could be achieved by delaying its release. In other words, we must seek out Pinḥas and Abisha in A.D. 1355 when the scroll was discovered.

How was the Abisha Scroll to enhance the standing of Pinḥas ben Joseph? The answer is probably to be found in a consideration of the other scroll with a chronogram similar to that of the Abisha scroll, the "Pinḥas scroll" (see above). In addition to its chronogram, the Pinḥas scroll carries a dedication which leaves little doubt that this scroll had some unusual sanctity and special place in the religious life of the Samaritan community.<sup>1</sup>

יתברכו בה עדת השמרים ימצאו אתה על המזבח  
ארך יומה רבה יום צומה ובכן ביום מקראתה ארך הצלות

This conclusion is verified by a note in Rylands Samaritan MS. 257. This manuscript has no colophon, but it is a modern manuscript of a chronicle which both includes the Samaritan Book of Joshua in a Hebrew form and brings the history of the Samaritans down to A.D. 1876.<sup>2</sup> It is one of a group of chronicles designated the "J" texts, derived from the *Sepher Hayamim*.<sup>3</sup> Whilst the text is parallel with and close to Chronicle Adler,<sup>4</sup> it is not identical with it and it has some interesting and significant comments to make. On folio 138 the manuscript presents us with the following information about Pinḥas ben Joseph, writer of the Pinḥas Scroll:

פינחס בן יוסף ג'ו שנה: אשר כתב התורה הגדולה אשר תצא ביום  
הכפור וביום מעמד הר סיני עד היום הזה: וזה הכהן אויליד שני  
בנים: ויקרא שם הבכור אלעזר ושם השני אבישע בעל המימרים  
הכשירים ואלצור אחיו הזוכיר אכהן על פני אביו:

(i.e., "Pinḥas the son of Joseph [reigned as High Priest] for fifty-six years.<sup>5</sup> He it was who wrote the great scroll of the Law which is brought out on the Day of Atonement and the Day of

<sup>1</sup> SH, p. 276.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. my "Inter-relationships", etc., for a discussion of this manuscript.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> E. N. Adler and M. Seligsohn, "Une Nouvelle Chronique Samaritaine", *Revue des Études Juives*, xlv (1901), 188-222; xlv. 70-98, 223-54; xlvi, 123-46.

<sup>5</sup> Adler translated ג'ו as 52 years (xlvi. 130), but on p. 131 the ג'ו years of Pinḥas ben Abisha are rendered 56 years as expected. For the source of the error see p. 54 n. 3 above.

Standing<sup>1</sup> up till the present day. This same priest had two sons, the eldest being called Eleazar and the second being called Abisha, the author of the beautiful<sup>2</sup> hymns.<sup>3</sup> Eleazar, his brother, was priest even when his father was alive ”).

The statement about the “ great scroll of the law ” is omitted in other Chronicles and may be one of the keys to the history of the Abisha Scroll, since that scroll, too, was exhibited on the Day of Atonement.

According to Castro,<sup>4</sup> following Ben Zvi,<sup>5</sup> the Abisha Scroll was exhibited to the community at the Synagogue on the day called *יום עצרתה*. In this opinion Castro and Ben Zvi were following the *Tolidah* quoted by Ben Zvi from a manuscript in Shechem,<sup>6</sup> and what Ben Zvi claimed to be Kirchheim’s account in the text of the Book of Joshua which was published in his *Karme Shomron*.<sup>7</sup> The version of the *Tolidah* quoted in Ben Zvi reads *ביום השני המתקרי יום עצרתה*, which Ben Zvi understood to mean the second day of the festival of Succoth or the Sabbath Day of the festival.<sup>8</sup> One must assume from this that Ben Zvi meant the second holy day after the intervening days of *Hol hamo’ed*, i.e. the twenty second day of the seventh month, which is known both as Succoth and Ašereth in the Samaritan religious

<sup>1</sup> The “ Day of Standing ” is the Wednesday before the Feast of Weeks. Cf. J. Van Goudever, *Biblical Calendars*, (Leiden, 1961), p. 260. However, there could also be an association with the Day of Atonement, since the words *יום מעמד* appear to be used also of the Day of Atonement, meaning, the “ Day of Revelation at Mount Sinai ”. Cf. M. Gaster, *Samaritan Oral Law and Ancient Tradition*, i. *Eschatology* (London, 1932), 113.

<sup>2</sup> For the meaning of *הכשירים*, cf. Z. Ben Hayyim, *Ivrit Ve’aramit Nusach Shomron* (Jerusalem 1957), ii. 496. For confirmation that Ben Hayyim is correct in accepting the Targum to Numbers xii I, cf. Chronicle Adler, op. cit. p. 130, where there is an inferior, but confirmatory, reading. *והשירות הטובות*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *SL*, ii. pp. xxvii–xxviii.

<sup>4</sup> *SA*, p. xviii n. 15.

<sup>5</sup> *SH*, p. 237.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* (p. 237).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 235, and Kirchheim, op. cit. Ben Zvi erred. His claim that Vilmar’s edition of Abu’l Fath was identical with the text of the *Sepher Yehoshua* published by Kirchheim is patently wrong since Kirchheim published a Hebrew translation of Juynboll’s *Chronicon Samaritanum* (Leiden, 1848) which is in no wise identical with Abu’l Fath. The passage he attributed to Kirchheim is not to be found in *Karme Shomron* at all but must have come from a Hebrew translation of Abu’l Fath.

<sup>8</sup> *SH*, p. 237, n. 9.

calendar.<sup>1</sup> Abu'l Fath indicated that the Abisha Scroll was found on the Sabbath Day of Succoth<sup>2</sup> and it may well seem likely that the Abisha Scroll would be exhibited to the faithful on the anniversary of its rediscovery, i.e. יום עצרתה = Succoth.

Against this there is the evidence of a number of scholars that the Abisha scroll was exhibited during the service of the Day of Atonement = יום כפור. Montgomery,<sup>3</sup> without citing his authority for the statement, says of the Day of Atonement, "Towards the conclusion of the service occurs the most solemn event of the year, the exhibition of the ancient scroll of Abishua [sic] *which occurs only on this occasion*" [my italics]. In a footnote he states that he knows of only one witness to this event, G. Grove, and this may be his source. Mills<sup>4</sup> also described the Day of Atonement liturgy and ritual, including the exhibition of the Abisha Scroll, and, although he quoted Grove extensively, he added details of his own, not found in Grove, which makes it clear that he has witnessed the ceremony itself. Both Grove<sup>5</sup> and Mills<sup>6</sup> make the point that *two* ancient and revered scrolls are exhibited together on the Day of Atonement. One of these is the Abisha Scroll, and there can be little doubt, from the evidence of the Rylands manuscript, that the other was the Pinhas Scroll. This is doubtless the scroll which was "fobbed off" on travellers who were looking for the Abisha Scroll. The Abisha Scroll was not only exhibited on יום עצרתה and יום כפור but there is evidence that it was displayed on other occasions.<sup>7</sup> The point of this

<sup>1</sup> Kahle (*PF*), p. 191, gave his version of the day on which the Abisha Scroll is publicly exhibited in translation only, in the unlikely statement that the "community always used to come to see it on the Monday called Jom [sic] Awerta", probably a misreading of "the second day, Yom Asarta".

<sup>2</sup> *A.F.* p. 32 and Robertson, "Concerning the Abisha Scroll", *op. cit.* pp. 4-6.

<sup>3</sup> *The Samaritans*, *op. cit.* p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> John Mills, *Three Months Residence at Nablus* (London, 1864), pp. 262-5, 308.

<sup>5</sup> G. Grove, "Nablos and the Samaritans", in F. Galton, G. Grove and W. Clark, *Vacation Tours in 1860 and 1861 in Galton, Narrative of an Explorer* (London, 1890), p. 252.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Robertson, "Concerning the Abisha Scroll", *op. cit.* pp. 9-11, where we see from the words of Meshalmah ben Ab Sakhwah Hadanfi, in 1714, that the Abisha Scroll had not been opened for more than half a century before his day, whereas later in his life it seems to have been used on several festivals. This is also the evidence of the letter in Appendix 1, pp. 170-80, in Gaster, *The Samaritans*.

display was not merely awe and respect for an ancient scroll, it was because these scrolls, written by members of the Pinḥas lineage, in themselves bestowed some of the blessings that would normally have come via the Messianic age. Abu'l Fath said expressly that the Abisha Scroll took the place of the *Ridhwan* (*Raḥuta*), the Samaritan eschatological period of Divine Grace and Favour, "and whoever seeks something in petition in its presence, or when separated from it, invites its intercession in heart and soul, will be received and his need will be met".<sup>1</sup> The same attribution of Divine favour is to be read in the dedication of the Pinḥas scroll, noted above, which also expressly states that it will bring blessings to the Samaritan community. From the time when it was discovered, the Abisha Scroll began to serve an eschatological function. It served to bring to the Samaritans a temporary substitute for the age of *Raḥuta* by an object held to be directly connected with the mediator of *Raḥuta*, Pinḥas, father of Abisha. Who first encouraged the Samaritans to consider the scroll in this way, we cannot say. We must suspect that the spiritual mentor of the community, Pinḥas ben Joseph, the High Priest, was responsible. We may also suspect that this was one of the reasons for the scroll having been "assembled". Perhaps the words in the chronogram להם רצון ה' וכבודו were included to stimulate eschatological considerations. But this cannot have been the prime and sole reason for its assembly. It may well have been that the colophon was produced to give authority to the form of the colophon, so that a similar colophon on another scroll would have been equally revered. In other words, the Abisha Scroll may well have been written to influence the way in which the Pinḥas scroll was regarded by the Samaritan community, and the fact that the Pinḥas scroll was also a source of communal blessing may have been the outcome of a deliberate design rather than an accident. The date of the Pinḥas scroll makes accidental similarities unlikely.

<sup>1</sup> *AF*, p. 32. The translation is Robertson's (*ibid.* p. 6). Cf. *AF*, p. xxv, where Vilmar discusses the State of Palestine before Abu'l Fath wrote. Life during the Priesthood of Pinḥas ben Joseph was very difficult indeed, and so alleviation of the misery of the Samaritans by the *Raḥuta* would have been opportune.

Von Gall was not far wrong in his estimate of the circumstances which produced the Abisha Scroll (see above). Most likely the hiatus in the priestly line which brought members of the Damascus priestly family into office in Shechem was the source of the inspiration for writing the scroll. However, Von Gall placed the event too early; it should have been related to the era of the recovery of the scroll.

The *Tolidah* and the other priestly chains<sup>1</sup> diverge when dealing with the events of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. There is no doubt that the sequence of priests is that shown in Chronicle Adler and the *Shalshallat*,<sup>2</sup> for a careful examination of the events recorded for each priestly reign indicates that here is an unbroken chronology. Yet there are two unexplained curiosities. Ithamar, the priest, came from Damascus to Schechem to assume the High Priesthood<sup>3</sup> and Joseph, who, on the face of things appears to be his great-grandson, also transferred from Damascus to Shechem to assume the High Priesthood.<sup>4</sup> The only explanation available to us is the implication in the *Tolidah*, that Joseph was *not* the great-grandson of Ithamar, but that the priestly line changed from branch to branch of the family.<sup>5</sup> If this is so, then Pinhas, son of Joseph, who had a fifty-six year incumbency as priest, may have found his legitimacy open to doubt at the beginning of his incumbency. There seem, from Cowley's reconstruction of the genealogy, to have been at least two other branches of the priestly family which could have offered a challenge to his position.<sup>6</sup> There was little that Pinhas could do in such circumstances except to trade on the name Pinhas and its place in Samaritan eschatological expectation. He may also have decided to use the

<sup>1</sup> Neubauer, op. cit. p. 411; Chronicle Adler, pp. 127-31; and *SL*, xlv, for a convenient summary. Cf. also, Gaster, "Chain etc.", op. cit. pp. 419/501.

<sup>2</sup> *Shalshallat* was the name of the work published by Gaster as the "Chain, etc."

<sup>3</sup> "Chain, etc." (ibid. pp. 418/500).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 419/501.

<sup>5</sup> *Tolidah*, loc. cit. Cowley, *SL*, p. xlv, comments that some of the priestly names were an intrusion, but the more problematic names are left without comment. See especially Cowley's now exploded table on p. xlv. Whence he derives all his information is not clear. It was not from the *Tolidah*.

<sup>6</sup> Cowley, *SL*, p. xlv.

services of his son, Abisha,<sup>1</sup> who, in his brief life, made a considerable reputation for himself as a liturgist and author, to enhance his status as priest. In 1341, according to the colophon, he wrote his scroll of the law, perhaps to prove his status as mediator of God's word. Then Abisha, his son, was put to work writing parts of a scroll which, with other fragmentary materials, was the source from which a complete work was fabricated. The chronogram was carefully devised to attach special sanctity to Pinḥas' own scroll, and ensure that he was unchallenged as High Priest.

The scroll had then to become publicly known. Pinḥas began to importune Abu'l Fath to write his Chronicle<sup>2</sup> and to research amongst the old scrolls—Robertson points out that the name Abu'l Fath means “father of the unrolling”, perhaps an epithet related to his researches and diligence in seeking information. Abu'l Fath resisted the pressures from Pinḥas for some time, perhaps for years,<sup>3</sup> but eventually gave way and settled down to write, completing the Chronicle and all the research in one year. Pinḥas most probably planned to have Abu'l Fath discover the “Abisha Scroll” during the course of his researches. Whether the plan worked and Abu'l Fath was privy to placing the scroll in the synagogue for it to be discovered on the Sabbath

<sup>1</sup> Pinḥas became High Priest in A.D. 1308/5609 After the Creation. He must, by Samaritan law, have been at least twenty years old when he became High Priest. He would have been at least 72-years-old when he died in 5665 and may have been older still. He was senile by 5661 (*supra*, p. 54, n. 3) when his son, Eleazar, became High Priest in his father's lifetime. Abisha may have been the elder brother, since his son Pinḥas became High Priest after the death of Eleazar (cf. A. Cowley, “The Samaritan Liturgy and the Reading of the Law”, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 1894, p. 125). Pinḥas remembered his grandfather, Pinḥas ben Joseph, but his father died young and probably before Pinḥas was born, since he said of his father, Abisha, “I saw not his face and he beheld not my face”. Abisha must have died, then, before Eleazar ben Pinḥas ben Joseph, his brother, became priest in 5661. Abisha's reputation was so well established that he must have been mature at his death. He would have been between 10- and 20-years-old in A.D. 1341, and well able to participate in Pinḥas' plans.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *AF*, p. xxiv. The “thirteen years” period of the *Tashqil* could refer to the period from the writing of the Pinḥas scroll to the time in 1353/4 when Pinḥas began to importune Abu'l Fath to begin his work. The date could well have reminded people, if the scroll had been found on time, that Pinḥas had written a scroll thirteen years previously.

<sup>3</sup> At least two years, perhaps three (from A.H. 753 to A.H. 756).

of Tabernacles or whether, in desperation after Abu'l Fath failed to discover the scroll, Pinhas placed it in the synagogue himself, is unknown. Abu'l Fath's own words, "The famous Book now to be found in Nablus in the keeping of our Master, the High Priest, Pinehas, may God bestow his blessings upon the people and grant him long to live, which God, Mighty and High, *revealed through [by means of] him after keeping it hidden and secret from those who preceded him in the office of High Priest*",<sup>1</sup> suggest that he had indeed found the scroll as planned by Pinhas, and was involved in putting it in the synagogue for public display where it was "newly discovered"<sup>2</sup> on the Sabbath of the Feast of Tabernacles. Abu'l Fath was probably the unwitting tool of Pinhas and his son Abisha in preserving for posterity the legend of the Abisha Scroll.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *AF*, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32.