

An alternative location for the ancient sanctuary of Shiloh?

John Wijngaards, 24 January 2020

It is only after some hesitation that I have finally decided to publish this paper regarding an alternative topographical identification for Shiloh. It will not be easy to dislodge its identification with Khirbet Seiloun, an identification almost universally accepted by archaeologists. To put forward a totally new theory seems to be tantamount to asking for a 'spanking' from the seniors in the field. 'When A.T. Richardson contended that Shiloh should be located in the ruins of 'Beit Silo', near Beitounia North East of Gabaon,¹ his view was judged to be "a theory sprung up in the brain of a half-wit who has done some reading, and which does not gain much weight from the speculations with which it is embellished".² The idea that I may run the risk of incurring a similar judgement has not escaped me.

There are, however, indications that seem to justify a reconsideration of Shiloh's topographical identity. Apart from the biblical arguments which I will discuss extensively in this article, a lack of positive archaeological information makes itself felt. The Danish excavations at Khirbet Seiloun uncovered nothing directly connected with the tabernacle or the temple,³ notwithstanding the optimistic evaluations made by W.F. Albright during the early campaigns of the excavation.⁴ Ch.C. McCown's report of 1930 characterizes the results with the remark that "numerous questions remain unanswered".⁵ O. Eissfeldt referred to this lack of positive information⁶ in a plea for fresh excavations at Seiloun.⁷ I. Finkelstein's excavations in the 1980's produced many interesting ancient finds, but again no trace of the sanctuary.⁸ Recently, in 2019 A. Schwartz noted that "the exact location of the Tabernacle complex at Shiloh has occupied many researchers, and this issue remains in dispute".⁹

¹ *Palestine Exploration Fund*, Quarterly Statement, July 1925; April 1927.

² "Théorie éclore dans le cerveau d'un drogma ayant de la lecture et qui ne gagne pas grand' chose aux speculations don't elle est ornées". P. H. Vincent, *RB* 35 (1926) p. 472.

³ M. Burrows, *What mean these stones?*, New York 1957, p. 202.

⁴ W.F. Albright, 'The Danish Excavations at Shiloh', *BASOR* 9 (1923) pp. 10-11; 'Les fouilles danoises à Seiloun', *RB* 37 (1928) p. 319.

⁵ Ch. C. McCown, 'Palestinian Archeology in 1929', *BASOR* 37 (1930) pp. 2-20, here pp. 12f.; see also H. Klaer's edition (in 1931) of *I det hellige Land. De Danske Udgravninger. Shilo, Elis og Samuels*, Copenhagen 1931.

⁶ "Von Silo wissen wir ausserordentlich wenig". O. Eissfeldt, 'Silo und Jerusalem', *Sup VT* 4 (1957) pp. 138-147, here p. 138.

⁷ "Der Karubenthron wird ebenso fortgeschleppt oder zerstrükel;t worden sind, wie das für die wertvolleren Kultgefässe anzunehmen ist. Aber Scherben von weniger wertvollen Kultgefässen werden schon noch im Boden stecken. Vor allem aber müssen Grundmauern des Tempels, die gewiss so ähnlich aussehen wie die des Tempels in nordsyrischen Tell Tainât noch zu finden sein." *Ib.* p. 147.

⁸ I. Finkelstein, 'Shiloh 1981', *Israel Exploration Journal* 32, no. 2/3 (1982) pp. 148-50; 'Shiloh 1982', *Israel Exploration Journal* 33, no. 1/2 (1983) pp. 123-26; 267-68; 'Shiloh Yields Some, But Not All, of Its Secrets: Location of Tabernacle Still Uncertain', *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12 no. 1 (1986) pp. 22-41.

⁹ A. Schwartz and A. O. Shemesh, 'The Cult in Shiloh during the Roman-Byzantine Period', *Religions* 10/11 (2019) p. 591.

My attention was first drawn to this question more than forty years ago when my academic mind was firmly focused on Deuteronomistic studies. I had published on the Deuteronomistic Creed.¹⁰ I wrote an extensive commentary on the book of Deuteronomy,¹¹ as well as related articles.¹² I demonstrated that the earliest celebrations of the covenant in the Holy Land took place in the North. They involved the Feast of Tabernacles in Succoth, followed by a procession of the Ark across the Jordan into the valley of Shechem and a ritual re-enactment of the covenant at Shechem itself.¹³ In this context the question arises: would it not have been more natural if Shiloh which held the Ark lay not far from Shechem, in fact in the valley itself?

Both Shechem and Shiloh seem to lay claim to the primacy among early Israelite sanctuaries. The relationship between these two centres of amphictyonic worship has been called "one of the most intricate traditio-historical problems presented by the Old Testament".¹⁴ The historical problem can, however, in no way be solved without a consideration of the topographical relationship between these centres.

The origin of this article starts 45 years ago when I compiled copious notes on the possible location of Shiloh. I then experienced a dramatic shift in my career which forced me to put the study on a back burner. Recently I rediscovered the file holding those notes, and reflecting on them again in the light of new research, I decided my thoughts are still worth publishing. For whatever they are worth, they may serve as arguments of a 'devil's advocate' spurring other researchers to check on the accuracy of their assumptions.

In this essay (1) I will first elaborate how and why topographic information about biblical sites has been lost. (2) I will spell out my reasons for doubting Shiloh's identification with Khirbet Seiloun. (3) I will, from biblical sources, add a brief reconstruction of what Shiloh's sanctuary must have looked like. (4) I will explain why biblical texts seem to favour a location of Samuel's Shiloh in the valley of Shechem. (5) I will then proceed to illustrate why Ta'anath Shiloh, i.e. present-day Khirbet et-Tana or Kirbet el- Fauqain the valley of Shechem, could have been the location of early Shiloh.

¹⁰ J. Wijngaards, *The Formulas of the Deuteronomistic Creed*, Leiden 1963. See also my Dutch book *Vazal van Jahweh*, Boeken bij de Bijbel, Baarn 1965.

¹¹ J. Wijngaards, *Deuteronomium uit de grondtekst vertaald en uitgelegd*, Roermond 1971.

¹² J. Wijngaards, 'Hosi' and He'eloh a Twofold Approach to the Exodus', *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965) pp. 91-102.

¹³ J. Wijngaards, *The Dramatization of Salvific History in the Deuteronomistic Schools*, Oudtestamentische Studien, vol.xvi, Brill, Leiden 1969; summary description of the Northern rituals on pp. 109-113.

¹⁴ E. Nielsen, *Shechem, a Traditio-Historical Investigation*, Copenhagen 1959, p. 322.

1. Preservation of topographical information

From a quick survey of the history of Palestine it will be clear that local remembrance of the roles played by geographical sites was generally lost.

1.1 The Assyrian captivity --- 722 BC

After the conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians, Sargon II exiled many Hebrews to other countries and resettled inhabitants of other countries in the conquered territory. On an Assyrian inscription Sargon II says: "In my first year of reign I carried away the people of Samaria to the number of 27,290. Fifty chariots for my royal equipment I selected. The city I rebuilt. I made it greater than it was before. People of the lands I had conquered I settled therein. My official (Tartan) I placed over them as governor."¹⁵

The Israelites who were exiled were undoubtedly the leaders of the population. And although some of the original Jewish inhabitants continued to live in Samaria, topographical traditions could easily have been lost during that period.

1.2 The Roman wars --- 66-73 AD and 132 AD

The Roman wars under Emperors Titus, Vespasian and Hadrian resulted in most of the Jewish population of Palestine being either killed, sold as slaves or relocated elsewhere.¹⁶ It caused an enormous gap in the preservation of topographical knowledge.

1.2a The *Onomasticon* of Eusebius (331 AD)

Eusebius tried to redress this in his renowned 'topographical dictionary of biblical places', *Onomasticon* (331 AD). We do not know what sources he used. The distances he indicates are often inaccurate. Eusebius seems to locate Shiloh east of Shechem. In his catalogue of placenames he states about Shilo:

"**Sêlô** – of the tribe of Ephraim. In it stayed the Ark from the beginning till the time of Samuel. 12 milestones in the Acrabattine region."¹⁷

Note: in the *Onomasticon* the Acrabattine region is regularly defined as 'towards the east from Neapolis for those who go down to the Jordan'.¹⁸

¹⁵ D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylon*, Oriental Institute University of Chicago, Chicago 1926, text L.II.4. See also 2 Kgs 17,3-6; 18,11-12.

¹⁶ C. M. Lehmann, Clayton Miles, 'Palestine: History: 135–337 AD: Syria Palaestina and the Tetrarchy', in *The On-line Encyclopedia of the Roman Provinces*, University of South Dakota 1998.

¹⁷ Eusebius, *Onomasticon: The Place Names of Divine Scripture*, translated by S. R. Notley, and Z. Safrai, Boston 2005.

¹⁸ In the *Onomasticon* (L214.61/87.28) Eusebius defines Acrabin as follows: "Acrabbin eastern

1.2b Hieronymus --- 347-420 AD

When Jerome, sixty years later, translated the *Onomasticon* into Latin, he changed the distance of Shiloh: “10 milestones in the Acrabattine region”.¹⁹ Jerome clearly identified Kirbet Seiloun as the location of ancient Shiloh. He mentions Shiloh 18 times in his letters, as here addressing a certain Marcella (392 AD): “accompanied by Christ, we shall have made our way back through Shiloh and Bethel, and those other places

mountain range of Judea. Of the tribe of Judah. Is a large village lying 4 miles in the east for those who go down towards the Jordan in the direction of Jericho through the so-called Acrabattine . . .”.

¹⁹ H. Newman, *Jerome and the Jews*, Ph.D. thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1997, p. 236.

where churches are set up like standards to commemorate the Lord's victories".²⁰ In an early Christian church at Kirbet Seiloun dating to the early Byzantine period (420 AD?) a mosaic inscription was found at the entrance to the church saying: "Lord Jesus Christ, have pity on Shiloh and its inhabitants. Amen".²¹

1.3 The Muslim occupation of Palestine --- 635-1900 AD

Apart from the interim period when Crusader kings ruled (1099-1187 AD), for 13 centuries the area was under the control of one Muslim government after the other. The original Hebrew names of hills, rivers, wadys, towns and villages which had been 'hellenised' in Roman times, were now retained in equivalent Arabic names. Remembering also that the same or similar names had been attached to different sites, pinpointing an ancient site to a specific location can usually not be reliably done from present-day names on a map.

In our research we will have to depend mainly on literary sources, biblical or otherwise, and archaeological excavations.

2. Reasons against the identification of Samuel's Shiloh with Khirbet Seiloun

2.1 Shiloh, from which town the Benjaminites took brides --- Jdg 21,15-23

There can be no doubt at all as to the fact that the Shiloh mentioned in Jdg 21,19 has to be identified with present-day Khirbet Seiloun. The biblical text says: "Shiloh which is north of Bethel, on the east of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah." The position of Khirbet Seiloun corresponds quite satisfactorily with this description.

S.R.Driver has drawn a graphic and convincing parallel: "As the traveller now journeys along the great north road which leads to Nablus (the ancient Shechem), he passes Beitin (Bethel) at 10 miles from Jerus.; at about 8 miles N. of Beitin (near Sinjil), if he turns to the right for about a mile, and then, at Turmus 'Aya, turns north-wards and crosses a small plain, he will see rising before him, at 9 1/2 miles N.N.E. of Beitin, the large rounded tell, on the summit of which is the ruined site of Seiloun; N. of the Tell runs the wady Seilun, and going down this to the W. he will rejoin the highroad at a

²⁰ 'Epistula 46: Paulae et Eustochiae ad Marcellam', In *S. Eusebii Hieronymi Opera*, Isidorus Hilberg (ed.), Pars 1, Epistulae I-LXX. Vindobonae: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, pp. 329–44; here p. 344.

²¹ L. Di Segni, Leah, 'Greek Inscriptions from early Northern Church at Shiloh and the Baptistery', in *Christians and Christianity, Vol. 3: Churches and Monasteries in Samaria and Northern Judea*, by C. Noga (ed.), Jerusalem 2012, pp. 209–18; here p. 209.

point 10 miles N. of Beitin, and a little E. of el-Lubban, evidently the Lebonah of Jdg 21,19, 3 miles N.N.W. of Seiloun."²²

E. Robinson had discovered the site in the beginning of the nineteenth century.²³

Khirbet Seiloun corresponds to the Shiloh mentioned in Jdg 21,19. But are we sure whether the text in question is speaking of *Samuel's* Shiloh, i.e the Shiloh where the ark and the tabernacle remained until the war with the Philistines? The context of the biblical account does not favour this identity. It will be remembered that Jdg 19-21 contains the record of Israel's punitive action against Benjamin. In Jdg 21,12 we learn that 400 virgins had been procured from Jabesh-gilead for the Benjamites that survived the massacre. These virgins were taken to "the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan" (v.12). The surviving Benjaminites are then summoned to appear before the congregation, presumably in the same camp at Shiloh (vs. 13-15). Since the Benjaminites are 600 in number, further discussion arises as to how to procure wives for the remaining 200 (vs. 16-18). They settle on the following advice: "So they said: 'Behold, there is a yearly feast of the Lord at Shiloh, which is north of Bethel, on the east of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah.' And they commanded the Benjaminites, saying: 'Go, and lie in wait in the vineyards, and watch; if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, then come out of the vineyards and seize each man his wife from the daughters of Shiloh" (vs. 19-21). The elders then proceed to give the assurance that they will pacify the fathers and brothers of these virgins (vs. 22). The plot is then put to execution (vs. 23) and the congregation dismissed (vs. 24).

From the text as it stands now we will have to distinguish two different Shilohs. For the camp in which the plan of capturing the girls is discussed (vs. 12-18) cannot be at the same time the scene of the unexpected manoeuvre (vs. 19-21). Moreover, the story, as it reads, introduces the Shiloh of vs.19 as an unknown locality which has to be precisely described. Such a description was not necessary for the well-known Shiloh of the central sanctuary (vs 12).²⁴ In other words: the text as it stands distinguishes Khirbet Seiloun from the Shiloh of the ark.²⁵

It is customary to object to this argument with the statement that the description of Jdg 21,19 has to be considered a later gloss. K. Budde wrote: "The elaborate

²² S. R. Driver, 'Shiloh', in *Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible*, Edinburgh 1902, vol. IV, pp. 499-500.

²³ E. Robinson, *Biblical Research in Palestine*, Boston 1841, vol. II, pp. 268-270.

²⁴ The addition 'in the land of Canaan' may easily be explained from the contrast with the Transjordan from which the girls are taken. Compare Jos 21,2.9.12.32. See also Gen 33,18 and Gen 12,6.

²⁵ J. Garstang says regarding Jdg 21,19: "The position of Shiloh corresponding exactly to Kirbet Seiloun ... is carefully described as though to distinguish it from Shiloh the familiar sanctuary of Israel". The author adds: "The passage is ascribed, however, to a late hand, and may have been inserted to preserve a record of the position." *Joshua, Judges*, London 1931, p. 251, note 1.

description of Shiloh's position in vs .19 is a meaningless interpolation; only at a very late date and outside Palestine could the need for such an interpolation have been felt."²⁶ G. F. Moore discussed the text in the same trend: "It is none the less remarkable that the writer should deem it necessary to define in this way the situation of the famous sanctuary; see v.19, where we find a minute topographical note. It is hard to say whether this explicitness is merely the archaeological style of a late author or an indication that he wrote for readers in foreign lands, perhaps himself lived in exile."²⁷ W.F.Albright ascribed the origin of the topographical note to Shiloh's lapse into oblivion. "When the Book of Judges was completed", he says, "probably at about 700 BC, the site of Shiloh was evidently abandoned since the redactor deems it necessary to give us the exact description of the place (Jud. 21,19)."²⁸ The latter opinion is the one adhered to by most later commentators who speak of a gloss "inserted to preserve a record of Shiloh's position".²⁹

I believe it to be an unwritten, but generally accepted principle of text analysis that no passage or part of a passage should be considered an interpolation, unless it can be proved to be so from indications in the text itself. Such indications may be: textual variants, grammatical inconsistencies, interruptions or contradictions in thought, and philological unevenness. And even these indications have to be handled with prudence, as the history of text analysis has amply demonstrated. In the text under discussion none of these indications seem to be there. There are no textual variants justifying a doubt. Neither do grammatical or philological considerations cast any suspicion on it. Then, does it interrupt the story? Is it meaningless? Does it fall out of tone in the whole narrative?

Let us begin to observe that the narrator of Jdg 19-21 has a keen interest in topographical detail. He describes, quite extensively, the Levite's journey past Jebus to Gibeah (19,10-15). He provides topographical details about the battle at Baal-tamar, saying in passing that there are two highways, "one which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah" (20,29-33). He informs us that the Benjaminites were pursued "from Nohah as far as opposite Gibeah on the east" (20,43). In the final discussions on how to procure brides for the surviving Benjaminites, a survey of townships is understood in the question: "What one is there of the tribes of Israel that did not come up to the Lord at Mizpah?" (21,8). Surely, all townships were reviewed from this angle, and, lo and behold, Jabesh-gilead was found deficient (21,8-9)! In the second series of discussions (21,17-19) a similar reviewing of all townships and their inherent possibilities is understood.

²⁶ K. Budde, *Das Buch der Richter*, KHAT vol. VII, Freiburg 1897, p. 19. Also C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges*, London 1918, p. 492.

²⁷ G. F. Moore, *Judges*, Edinburgh 1895, p. 447.

²⁸ W.F.Albright, *The Danish Excavations at Shiloh*, BASOR 9 (1923) pp. 10-11.

²⁹ J. Garstang, l.c.(note 13). Also J. de Fraine, *Rechtters*, Roermond 1955, pp. 127f.

In this context vs.19 enters, very naturally, as the redeeming thought. The word "behold" expresses this element of discovery: there is a local feast in a township called 'Shiloh', a Shiloh which is normally overlooked. The topographical definition serves both to pin it down and to distinguish it from the Shiloh of the central sanctuary. The detail of its localization fits well into the narrative: it is consistent with the narrator's topographical interest and it is required by the flow of narration. Quite congenially vs.20-22 then detail the assembly's decision, just as vs. 10-11 had detailed the decision taken after the first consultation. To summarize: there is no indication from the text itself that would justify us to disqualify vs. 19b as a gloss.³⁰

Let us, however, for the sake of argument, suppose that vs. 19b be a later gloss. Let us assume that its topographical description be meant to characterize the Shiloh of the central sanctuary. We are then faced with the unanswerable question: why should anyone add the topographical description of a place so well known as the Shiloh of the sanctuary? It is no use suggesting this may have been done for readers outside Palestine. The topographical description presupposes readers familiar with the Holy Land, with places such as Bethel, Shechem and Lebonah! Neither will it do to claim that Shiloh was deserted and abandoned in later times. The Bible clearly presupposes that the Shiloh of the sanctuary existed as a town until and after the fall of Jerusalem. 1 Sam 3,21 states explicitly that Shiloh remained a place of revelation even after the Philistine war. From 1 Kg 14,2.4 we learn that the prophet Ahijah lived in Shiloh and it is there that Jeroboam's wife visited him. Jer 41,5 speaks of a delegation of men from Shechem and Shiloh and Samaria. Shiloh remained an inhabited town, therefore, and as such its localization could not possibly be obscure enough to justify a gloss.³¹

2.2 Excavations at Kirbet Seiloun

It is here that we have to come to grips with the archeological findings. Let us first look at the Danish excavations at Seiloun. According to these excavations Seiloun was a Hebrew settlement that was violently destroyed at about 1050 BC. After this, from 1050 to till about 300 BC, there is no evidence of any occupation of the Tell. It is claimed that these findings confirm those biblical passages which seem to imply the early destruction and lasting abandonment of Shiloh, notably Jer 7,12-14; Jer 26,6,9; 1

³⁰ H. W Herzberg admits, for this reason, that vs. 19b cannot be a gloss (*Die Bücher Joshua, Richter, Ruth*, ATD vol IX, Göttingen 1953). He contends, however, that the topographical note dates from the very ancient stage of Shiloh's (Seiloun's) Canaanite occupation, before it became the central sanctuary.

³¹ I cannot see, moreover, how W. F. Albright can call the ruins of Shiloh 'so well known as to be proverbial in Jeremiah's time' (Jer 7,12; 26,6) and yet in the same period believe them unknown enough to justify a topographical note. L.c. BASOR 9 (1923) p. 11.

Sam 4; Ps 78,60ff.³² In these last mentioned passages, however, there is no indication of the city Shiloh having been made a lasting ruin.

Read the narration of 1 Sam 1-4. The story reaches its climax with the death of Eli (4,18) and the loss of the ark (4,11,17,21-22). There is no mention of any destruction of Shiloh in the whole narrative, neither in the announcement of Yahweh's punishment (2,27-36; 3,11-14) nor in its execution. If such a destruction had taken place, it would surely have been interpreted to be part and parcel of the divine punishment. The absence of any mention of such a destruction makes it very likely that it never took place. The death of Eli's sons and the loss of the ark caused the gradual abandonment of Shiloh's sanctuary and the decline of Eli's house. Psalm 78,61-64 describes the heavy losses suffered by Israel in the Philistine war: the flower of the army, the young men and the priests, die. There is no mention of a destruction of cities: but the maidens remain unmarried and the widows unconsolated. Also vs. 60 does not speak of a destruction of Shiloh, but of an abandonment by Yahweh: "He forsook his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelled among men." Psalm 78 thus confirms the analysis of 1 Sam 1-4 which also speaks of an abandonment of the sanctuary rather than of a destruction of the city.

Then what about the passages in Jer 7 and 26? In both chapters Jeremiah is prophesying specifically against an exaggerated trust in the Temple: "Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.' " (Jer 7,4). The inhabitants of Jerusalem considered it unthinkable that Yahweh would ever abandon his Temple. It is in this context that Jeremiah points to Shiloh. Had Yahweh not abandoned his sanctuary in Shiloh? He would do likewise to the Temple in Jerusalem, if the people were not to convert: "Go now to my place that was in Shiloh where I made my Name dwell at first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel!" (Jer 7,12); "... therefore I will do to the house which is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh!" (Jer 7,14); "... I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth!" (Jer 26,6); "This house shall be like Shiloh and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant" (Jer 26,9). In all four passages the comparison is drawn, not between Shiloh and Jerusalem as cities, but between the sanctuary at Shiloh and the temple in Jerusalem.³³

The immediate context of the phrases used does not necessarily imply a destruction, but abandonment and desolation (Jer 26,9; 7,15). No doubt, Jeremiah foresees that

³² See esp. W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, Eugene 2003, pp. 219f.; *Archeology and the Religion of Israel*, Baltimore 1946, pp. 103-105; G. A. Baryon, *Archeology and the Bible*, Philadelphia 1949, p. 128; Millar Burrows, *What mean these stones?*, New York 1957, pp. 201, 251, 281.

³³ The word *maqôm*, place, is often a specific term for 'sanctuary'. See Gen 22,3; 28j,11; Deut 12,2f.; 12,13f.; 1 Kgs 8,24f.; Ps 24,3; etc. The same applies to the Aramaic *maqâm*. Also in Jer 7,14b it carries this meaning in parallelism to Jer 7,12.

this abandonment will come about through destruction (cf. Jer 7,20; the parallel in Jer 26,18); but the stress within the comparison is on abandonment: "I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, the offspring of Ephraim!" (Jer 7,15) The implication of this line is clear: Yahweh's abandonment of his sanctuary in Shiloh was the prelude to exile of the Northern Kingdom.

1 Sam 1-4, Psalm 78 and Jer 7; 26 do not seem to imply a destruction of Shiloh, even less that Shiloh had been made a proverbial ruin. But they do imply that Yahweh's former sanctuary had been deserted and was in a dilapidated state. This decline of the sanctuary will, of course, have caused Shiloh's deterioration also as a city. It did not, however, mean that the city as such ceased to exist. To the continuation of the city witness 1 Sam 3,21; 1 Kg 14,2,4 and Jer 41,5, as we have seen above.³⁴ The biblical testimony, however, to Shiloh's continuation as a city manifestly excludes Khirbet Seiloun from having been the Shiloh of the tabernacle. For the Danish excavations brought to light that Seiloun was not inhabited from about 1050 till 350 BC, whereas we know from the Bible that Shiloh remained a city during that period.

Seiloun's desolation during those centuries would, incidentally, give an extra reason for the topographical exactness of Jdg 21,19: not only was it necessary to distinguish this 'Shiloh' from the well-known Shiloh of the sanctuary, but its state of desolation would have made people forget that this 'Shiloh' had also existed.

Have I overstated my case in the foregoing paragraphs? Have I proved too much? Jdg 21,19b could, of course, be a gloss skilfully inserted into the text by a later redactor. It could be that a narration of Shiloh's destruction was to follow on 1 Sam 4, but was omitted in view of the narrator's interest in the fate of the ark. It may be pure chance that Psalm 78,60 and Jer 7; 26 speak of the abandonment of the sanctuary rather than the destruction of Shiloh. It is, strictly speaking possible that the prophet Ahijah lived as a hermit among the ruins of Shiloh, even though the Bible speaks of it as of any other city (1 Kg 11,29; 12,15; 14,2,4; 15,19). It may be purely accidental that in Jer 41,5 Shiloh is grouped with two such prominent cities as Samaria and Shechem. If we reconstruct the facts according to all these, somewhat improbable, but yet possible explanations of the texts, then we could square our biblical information with the findings at Khirbet Seiloun. We may then even conclude it to be a pure coincidence that no trace of the ancient sanctuary was discovered during the excavations

³⁴ It may be worthwhile to cite S. R. Driver on this matter as his words, written long before the Danish excavations, contain the judgment of an unprejudiced observer: "Shiloh itself, however, continued to be inhabited; for the prophet Ahijah, who promised Jeroboam the Kingdom of the tribes, was a native of it (1 Kg 11,29; 12,15 [2 Chr 16.5]; 15,9; cf. 2 Chr 9,29) and Jeroboam's wife went there to consult him when her husband was ill (1 Kg 14,2.4). See also Jer 41,5". 'Shiloh', note 13 above. See also F. Buhl, *Geographie des alten Palästinas*, Leipzig 1896, p. 187.

As far as I can judge, the identification of Samuel's Shiloh with Khirbet Seiloun might be acceptable as an emergency solution forced on us by defect of anything better. But the solution will be accepted only at the expense of the biblical texts. The first and natural meaning of these texts would seem to imply that Yahweh abandoned his sanctuary at Shiloh, that the city of Shiloh, however, continued to exist, and that there had been another, unknown or less known, Shiloh at Khirbet Seiloun. The question is: do we have an alternative to Khirbet Seiloun?

3. Reconstructing ancient Shiloh from biblical sources

We have already had occasion to point out that a destruction of the sanctuary a not necessarily implied in 1 Sam 4, Ps 76 and Jer 7 & 26. These texts would rather seem to speak of an 'abandonment'. The abandonment was due to the removal of Yahweh's ark from Shiloh's sanctuary. But since Shiloh's sanctuary kept functioning as a place of revelation even afterwards, the normal revelational equipment of the sanctuary must have remained intact. I do not know if the word 'equipment' does appropriately express the idea. I mean with 'equipment' all the accidental features which characterized places of revelation: holy trees, stones and oracular media.

Comparative religion has taught us not to underestimate the significance of a 'sacred place', the place where the divine communicates with humans and breaks through into the profane world. A 'sacred place' is never chosen by a human being: it can only be 'discovered' and 'recognized' in the signs of the hierophany. A 'sacred place' will, therefore, be distinguished from 'profane space' on account of some sacred entourage: a precinct on a hill, a tree, a holy stone, a well, or some other sacred objects.³⁵ In the Old Testament world this same basic concept of 'sacred place' is everywhere presupposed, and thus we may safely apply the notion also to the sanctuary of Shiloh. There must have been some sacred entourage, some revelational outfit, which, apart from the ark, served as the medium of divine revelation.

Are we still in a position to reconstruct this 'sacred entourage' of Shiloh's sanctuary? I believe that this can be done to a certain extent.

3.1 Shiloh a place of revelation

In 1 Sam 3,1-14 we read about Yahweh's first apparition to Samuel. It states that Samuel was acknowledged as a prophet 'from Dan to Beersheba'. In vs. 21 another comment is made, a remark which not only affects Samuel, but also Shiloh: "And Yahweh appeared again at Shiloh. For Yahweh revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of Yahweh. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel" (1 Sam 3,21; 4,1a).

³⁵ M. Eliade, *Das Heilige und das Profane*, Hamburg 1947, pp. 13-39.

M. Noth has made an analysis of the Samuel traditions, in which he draws our attention to the implications of 1 Sam 3,21a. After having demonstrated that this verse should be taken as a later 'addition', he observes: "This phrase can only have been formulated by someone who considered Shiloh an important place of divine revelation even after the destruction of the sanctuary and after Samuel's time. This seems peculiar, but it is clearly implied by the text. Quite a few scholars have believed that the text should be corrected, so as to mean that only Samuel were to have received further divine revelations at Shiloh (W.Caspari, *Die Samuelbücher*, 1926, p.56), or so as to mean just about the opposite of what it says now (O.Eissfeldt, *Die Komposition der Samuelbücher*, 1931, p.5). But there is no sufficient reason for such a correction of the text, and we are, therefore, bound to keep to the wording as it stands. Consequently, there must have been, even during the period of the Kings, circles in Israel which attributed to Shiloh the rank of a privileged location for divine revelation, whether this be with an intentional anti-Jerusalemite bias or not."³⁶

Shiloh remained a place of revelation even after the ark had left the sanctuary. The implication of this is clear: the sanctuary at Shiloh itself was 'a place of revelation'. This quality it did not acquire by the presence of the ark, but by the nature of its precinct. H.W.Herzberg, discussing the same verse 1 Sam 3,21a, remarks: "Shiloh will now become an important place of divine revelation. This does not depend on God's Ark, but on the person to whom God deigns to confide the 'gift of his word'."³⁷ Of course, not everyone is made the recipient of revelation. But the question of the recipient is not directly discussed in vs.21a. The phrase asserts that further divine revelations were made at Shiloh. Shiloh is, thereby, characterized as being a favoured spot of revelation.

3.2 Shiloh a *hêkal* with an enclosure

Let us begin with noting that Shiloh did not have a Temple in the full sense of the word. Some authors have laid much weight on the word *hêkal* (1 Sam 1,9 and 3,2) and 'House of Yahweh' (1 Sam 1,7; 3,15) in the Samuel traditions. They point out that the same traditions speak of a 'doorpost' (1 Sam 1,9) and of 'revolving doors' (1 Sam 3,15). From this they infer that Shiloh must have possessed some kind of proper Temple. This is, however, contrary to the explicit assertions of many other traditions. Nathan's oracle says that Yahweh never lived in a house (*bêt*), but only in a tent (*'ôhel*); and a tabernacle (*mishkân*: 2 Sam 7,6). 3 Kgs 3,2 records that until Solomon's time no house (*bêt*) had been built to Yahweh's name. Psalm 78,60 speaks of Yahweh's tabernacle (*mishkân*) and tent (*'ôhel*) at Shiloh; but regarding Jerusalem's sanctuary it states that God 'built it like the high heavens' (vs. 69). Jeremiah likewise speaks of Shiloh's

³⁶ M. Noth, 'Samuel and Shiloh [1 Sam 1-3]', *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963) pp. 390-400; here p. 399.

³⁷ H. W. Herzberg, *Die Samuelbücher*, Göttingen 1956, p. 29.

sanctuary as a 'place' (*maqôm*: Jer 7,12)¹, but of Jerusalem's Temple as a house (*bêt*: Jer 7,14; 26,6).

These sources are too pronounced and too multiple than that we could hold them to be mistaken or incorrect. On the other hand, there is no reason to disqualify the information recorded in the Samuel traditions.

The apparent contradiction between the various sources can be solved if we recognize that the sanctuary of Shiloh was called a *hêkal*.³⁸ The enclosure, first a circle of stones, in later times a wall, is a constant and necessary feature of sanctuaries, as comparative religion has shown.³⁹ The enclosure signifies the continued presence of the hierophany within its bounds. It also serves the purpose of preserving profane humans from the danger of entering the sacred space without due care. The ritual importance of the threshold of the Temple also derives from this. Moses is told to set boundaries to Sinai (Ex 19,12f,23ff) lest the people see Yahweh and perish.

Archaeology has shown that the sanctuaries in ancient Palestine did not always consist of massive buildings, such as have been found in Megiddo and Tell Duweir (both Late Bronze Age),⁴⁰ in Shechem (Late Bronze I)⁴¹ and in Bethshan (Early Iron).⁴² Excavations in Ai have uncovered an Early Bronze temple precinct which consisted of a rather large enclosure with a fairly small shrine (just one room) in its right-hand corner.⁴³ Basically there is also the structure of the Assyrian Temple in which we find a spacious walled courtyard with a relatively small shrine that contained the cult image.⁴⁴ It is interesting in this context that the word *hêkal* itself does not derive from a root indicating a 'building', but from y-k-l, k-h-l (*kûl*), which means 'to be capacious, spacious'.

3.3 Shiloh and the chair at the gate

The data from the Samuel traditions fit in with this interpretation. As point of departure we might take the throne (*kiššê*) on which Eli was seated. It should not be thought that this was no more than a 'chair' that could be placed anywhere at will. We learn from the story that it must be considered an official seat, since it is from it that Eli gives his oracle to Hannah (1 Sam 1,9-17) and since Eli's fall from the seat is obviously the symbolical climax of the rejection Eli's priestly dynasty (1 Sam 4,18).⁴⁵

³⁸ In this way Naboth's vineyard is said to be next to Ahab's *hêkal* (3 Kgs 21,1.16.17). The ordinary people who remain in the forecourts can yet be said to be in the middle of Jahweh's *hêkal* (Ps 48,10; cf. 29,9; 65,5).

³⁹ M. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, London, pp. 370f; *Traité d'Histoire des Religions*, Paris 1959, pp. 318ff; K. Goldammer, *Die Formenwelt des Religiösen*, Stuttgart 1961, pp. 192ff; F. Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion*, Stuttgart 1961, pp. 128ff.

⁴⁰ K. Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land*, London 1965, pp. 203ff.

⁴¹ W.F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, London 1949, p. 104.

⁴² K. Kenyon, *ib.* pp. 251f.

⁴³ K. Kenyon, *ib.* pp. 116f.

⁴⁴ E. O. James, *From Cave to Cathedral*, London 1965, pp. 147ff.

⁴⁵ Compare 3 Kgs 2,4; 9,5; 1,13-48.

Moreover, the text says Eli was sitting, not on a seat, but on *the* seat (1 Sam 1,9). Where was this 'seat', this 'throne' placed? 1 Sam 1,9 states : "at the door-post (*mezûzah*) of Yahweh's Temple (*hêkal*)". Not only houses, but also gates had such a 'doorpost' (see Ez 45,19). We read in Ez 46,2: "the prince shall enter by the vestibule of the gate (of the inner court) from without, and shall take his stand by the door-post of the gate. The priests shall offer his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate. Then he shall go out ..." The prince was, therefore, to stand just inside the gate on the threshold, facing the Temple building. Eli's seat must likewise have been just inside the gate, facing into the precinct. This position is confirmed by the fact that Eli observes Hannah's prayer (1 Sam 1,12-13).

It is also confirmed, by the descriptions in 1 Sam 4,13 and 18. In the former text we find that Eli is seated on the seat 'near to the road' anxiously waiting for news of the Ark. The latter text says that hearing the news Eli fell 'from the seat backwards *through* the gate'.⁴⁶ Again, the seat is in the same position as described before: just inside the gate, facing inwards. Hearing about the loss of the Ark Eli falls backwards, and thus away from the sanctuary: even more expressive of the rejection implied. At first sight one might think that the seat was purposely put near the road because of Eli's anxiety regarding the Ark (1 Sam 4,13). But it is clearly said that the runner first spreads the news in the city (vs. 13b). Eli hears the outcry in the city and sends for the man (vs. 14). He is therefore not at the city gate, but inside the precinct. The remark that Eli's seat was 'near to the road' (vs. 13) explains why Eli could hear the commotion outside the precinct. 1 Sam 1,9; 4,13; and 4,18 taken together presuppose a walled precinct with a gate, just inside of which Eli's official seat was placed, facing inwards. The opening of the doors (*dâlethôth*) in 1 Sam 3,15 will also refer to the swinging doors of the same gate. Eli's official 'seat' must have faced the 'sanctuary' as the place of revelation, or some object in front of the sanctuary.

For the priestly authors the favourite place of revelation was 'at the door of the tent of meeting' to which Yahweh came down in 'pillar of cloud' (Num 12,5; Ex 33,7-11; etc.). "At the door of the tent of meeting I will meet with you, to speak there with you" (Ex 29,42, cf.43). G. von Rad has convincingly demonstrated that the 'Tent of meeting' has precisely to be understood as such a place of revelation to which Yahweh 'comes down' in the cloud - not to be confused with the Ark above which he is thought always to be present.⁴⁷

In this connection it is good to note that the priestly authors explicitly affirm that revelations at Shiloh happened in this same place. They tell us that the Tent of Meeting was set up at Shiloh (Jos 18,1). They inform us of the circumstance that Joshua divided

⁴⁶ For this meaning of 'through' for *beOad*, see Gen 26,8; Jdg 5,28; 2 Sam 20,21; Job 22,13 etc. *yad* in combination with *shaOar* may indicate its extension, its breadth. Cf. 2 Sam 15,2; Ps 140,6; Num 24,24.

⁴⁷ G. von Rad, 'Zelt und Lade', NKZ 42 (1931) pp.476-498.

the land by lot “at Shiloh, before Yahweh, at the door of the Tent of Meeting” (Jos 19,51). And Psalm 99 recalls: “Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel was also among those who called on his name. They cried to Yahweh and he answered them; he spoke to them in the pillar of cloud” (vs. 6-7).

3.4 Shiloh's 'pillar of divination'

The text speaks of God's revelation 'in the pillar of cloud' and equates Moses' and Aaron's experience with that of Samuel. Since Samuel is known to have had revelations in Shiloh (1 Sam 3,21) and since the Tent of Meeting is supposed to have been in Shiloh according to the priestly authors, we may conclude to at least one tradition having ascribed to Shiloh apparitions or revelations of Yahweh 'in a pillar of cloud' and 'at the door of the Tent of Meeting'.

Pursuing this presence of the 'pillar of cloud' at Shiloh, I would like to venture the possibility that this pillar was originally identical to an 'oak of divination'. The arguments: supporting this hypothesis are the following:

- It is remarkable that the two bronze pillars in the Temple of Solomon were made to resemble trees (cf. the pomegranates around the stem and the flowers in the capitals (1 Kgs 7,15-22). This would point to the fact that one felt the need of such 'imitation' sacred trees in the Temple area. It is interesting: to note that the King had his place 'by the pillar' (2 Kgs 11,14; 23,3). Could it be that this 'throne under a sacred tree', attested in Semitic reliefs,⁴⁸ had some special significance in establishing the authority of the king? Achimelech is made king “under the terebinth of the pillar at Shechem” (Jdg 9,6) and Josiah concludes a covenant 'with God and the people' in the same liturgical position (2 Kgs 23,3).
- Comparative religion has established that ancient sanctuaries, which were considered 'centres of the world' where communication with the divine reality became possible, almost invariably possessed an altar (or 'stone') and a sacred tree. M.Eliade states: 'The idea of 'centre', of 'absolute reality'-- absolute because it is the receptacle of the sacred -- is implied itself in the most elementary notions of the 'holy place', notions from which the sacred tree is never absent'.⁴⁹ He goes on to point out that the sacred pillar serves to 'reinforce' the function of the tree and that, at times, the tree is substituted for by a sacred pillar.⁵⁰ The sacred tree, preferably situated on a hillock, is considered to penetrate heaven with its branches, and is, in fact, the cosmic pillar that unites the earth with heaven above and hell below. With this

⁴⁸ U. Holmberg, 'Der Baum des Lebens', *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, Série B, vol XVI, Helsinki 1922-1923, fig. 30, pp. 83ff.

⁴⁹ M. Eliade, *Traité d'Histoire*, p. 227.

⁵⁰ M. Eliade, *ibid.*, pp. 237-269, esp. p. 259.

background it is not unlikely that the 'pillar of cloud' was a name for, or a substitute of, the sacred tree which 'made' the holy place a holy place.

- This becomes even likely if we consider that the Hebrew word *°anan* now meaning 'cloud' could have been confused with a root that had an entirely different meaning. The root *°n-n* in Ugaritic is connected with the notion of communication (*°nn ilm* = 'messengers of the gods'; cf. 51:VIII:15; *°nt*: IV:76) and the *po'el* form of *°anan* in Hebrew covers the notion of 'divining', of communicating messages from 'the other world' (cf. Lev 19,26; Deut 18,10.14; Is 2,6; Jer 27,9; Mic 5,11). Twice this 'divination' is explicitly connected to the medium of the sacred tree: 'the diviners' oak' (Jdg 9,37) and the 'diviner' operating under the terebinths (Is 57,3-5). I submit, therefore, that *°ammûd °anan* originally may have meant something in the line of 'the pillar of divination', the 'pillar of divine messages'. This agrees with the function of *°ammûd °anan* as a medium of revelation (cf. Ps 99,7; Nm 12,5; Ex 33,7-11).

It is not difficult to see how confusion could arise because of the similar sounding Hebrew word *°anan* meaning *cloud*, especially if rituals also included the burning of incense (cf. Ex 19,16-18; 24,16-17; 1 Kgs 8,10-11.42). From this again could develop the tradition of the 'pillar of cloud' moving with Israel through the desert (Ex 13,21; Nm 14,14).

3.5 Shiloh's altar

In Jos 22 we find mention of another object in Shiloh's sanctuary: 'the altar of Yahweh that stands at the door of his tent' (Jos 22,29). It was an altar 'of great size' as the passage makes clear (Jos 22,10.28) and was meant for all kinds of sacrifices (Jos 22,29). Also the Samuel tradition confirms the existence of such an altar at Shiloh (1 Sm 2,12-17). At least according to the tradition of Jos 22 the altar had a function in the amphictyony of tribes: it expressed the unity of the tribes in the service of the one 'God of Israel' so that it did not tolerate a rival altar (cf. Jos 22,19.29).

We may summarize our reconstruction of the ancient 'place of revelation' at Shiloh by pointing out that it possessed:

- a walled enclosure with a shrine ('tabernacle') in the middle;
- a 'chair' for the officiating priest 'near the gate' of the enclosure. probably facing towards the shrine;
- a 'pillar of cloud', or perhaps better a 'pillar of divination' which was in all likelihood a sacred tree or a pillar substituting for it;
- an altar in front of the tabernacle.

Until the battle at Ebenezer Shiloh also possessed the ark of the covenant. God appeared to Samuel near the ark or 'on top of the ark' (1 Sam 3,1-10), thus confirming

the ark as a medium of theophany (see also Ex 25,22; Is 6). However, even after the ark had been taken away, Yahweh continued to 'reveal himself' to Samuel (1 Sam 3,21; 4,1a).

4. Biblical data seem to postulate that the sanctuary of Shiloh stood in the valley of Shechem

4.1 Does 'at Shechem' refer to the city of Shechem?

The sanctuary of Yahweh *at Shechem* (*beshekem*) possessed the following characteristic features: (i) an oak tree: the oak of Moreh (cf. Gen 12,6; 35,4; Jos 24,25; Jdg 9,6; and Dt 11,30); (ii) a holy stone or pillar (cf. Jos 24,26; Jdg 9,6); (iii) and an altar dedicated to Yahweh the God of Israel (Gen 12,7; 33,20; Dt 27,2-8).⁵¹

Apart from this sanctuary, there was in Shechem itself, that is: within its city walls, an ancient sanctuary to 'Baal of the Covenant' (cf. Jdg 8,33; 9,27.46).⁵² Archaeological excavations of *Tell Balatah* the site of ancient Shechem, have indeed uncovered an enormous temple complex within the city walls. The temple existed already during the Hyksos-period of Shechem (1720-1550 BC), but was rebuilt and modified during the Canaanite settlement (1550-1150 BC). Of special interest is the presence of a 'holy stone' in the precincts of this Canaanite temple.⁵³

If we call to mind the fact that the fundamental idea of such a holy place consisted in it being the 'navel of the land', the 'centre of the world', the 'meeting point of heaven and earth', it will be realized that no two places making this identical claim could be within a short distance of one another. Yet the 'sanctuary of Yahweh' is so distinctly Canaanite in origin (the oak tree; the holy stone) and of such overriding importance as a place of revelation (Gen 12,1; 35,1) and amphictyonic worship (Jos 24; Dt 27,2-26; 8,30-35) that it could not but stand in rivalry to the sanctuary of the Covenant Baal. This means: the ancient holy place at the oak of Moreh must have been situated at a considerable distance from *Tell Balatah*.

This inference is confirmed by a careful reading of Jdg 9,6 in which it is stated that the citizens of Shechem and Beth-Millo 'came together and went' (lit. 'walked') to make Abimelech king at the oak of the holy stone⁵⁴ that is '*at Shechem*'. This does not only imply that Yahweh's sanctuary was situated 'outside the city',⁵⁵ it implies that the sanctuary may have been anywhere in the wide valley of Shechem. This follows from a proper understanding of the phrase '*at Shechem*' (*beshekem*), a phrase which from

⁵¹ J. L'Hour, 'L'Alliance de Sichem', *Revue Biblique* 69 (1962) pp. 389f.; H. J. Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, Oxford 1966, p. 135.

⁵² J.T. Milik, 'Le sanctuaire de Ba'al Berit à Sichem', *Revue Biblique* 44 (1959) pp. 560ff.

⁵³ Cf. W. F. Albright, *The Archeology of Palestine*, Harmondsworth 1949, pp. 103ff.; G. E. Wright, *BASOR* 144 (1956) pp. 9-20; 148 (1959) pp. 11-28; J. F. Roos and L. E. Toombs, *Archeology* 14 (1960) no 3.

⁵⁴ Read *maşşebah* instead of *muşşab*.

⁵⁵ K. Galling, *Biblishes Reallexicon*, Tübingen 1957, col. 477.

the very contrast of Jdg 9,6 can already be seen to be different from 'in' or 'near' the city of Shechem.

4.2 Shechem in the Tell-Amarna letters

Shechem is undoubtedly the name of a city (cf. Jos 20,7; 21,21; Jdg 21,19; Os 6,9). However, the origin of the name, meaning 'shoulder, mountain range',⁵⁶ shows it to be the name of a region rather than that of a town. It was the region that was, most likely, known as Shechem long before the dominating town in it was named after it.

From the Tell-Amarna letters (ca. 1406-1453 BC) we know that the mountains of Samaria, i.e. almost all the hill country from Jerusalem to the valley of Jizrael,⁵⁷ were under the effective sway of the Canaanite King Lab'ayu who had Shechem (Shikma) as his capital. The 'land of Shikma' (Am 289,23) must have been far greater than just the city of Shechem and its immediate surroundings.⁵⁸ The biblical use of the name 'Shechem' endorses this wider sense, both geographically and politically.

4.3 Pasturing flocks 'in Shechem'

Joseph is sent to his brothers 'who are pasturing the flocks 'in Shechem' (Gen 37,12-13). Surely this can have meant neither the city of Shechem, nor the agricultural lands cultivated by the Shechemites in the fields surrounding Shechem (cf Jdg 9,27), but must have referred to deserted slopes and meadows in the many hills and dales of the region. Small wonder that Joseph has to look in many places 'wandering about in the country' (Gen 37,12-13). 'In Shechem' meant: in the region of Shechem.⁵⁹

4.4 Coronation ceremony 'in Shechem'

When all Israel came together 'to make Roboam king', they gather 'beshechem' (1 Kgs 12,1). This cannot have meant at the city of Shechern, as Shechem had been reduced to a ruin by Abimelech more than a hundred years before (Jdg 9,45) and as we are explicitly told that the city was only rebuilt by Roboam's rival Jeroboam after the

⁵⁶ It is usually presumed that the name 'shekem' would refer to the peculiar position of the Ebal and Gerazim, the two hills that seem to form a natural pair of 'shoulder blades'. However, apart from 'shoulder', Hebrew 'shekem' also means an animal's back; cf. Is 9,3; 1 Sam 10,9; 21,13; cf. also Ugaritic *ṭkm* as 'top' in text 126:IV:14 ('top of the building'); krt75 'top of the wall'.

⁵⁷ A. Alt, *Die Landnahme der Israeliter in Palästina*, Kleine Schriften I pp. 108-110.

⁵⁸ A. Alt, *ibid.*

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that the various 'stations' of Abram remain within the tracts of country accessible to shepherds, viz. the oak of Moreh at Shechem, between Bethel and Ai (Gen 12,8) and the oak of Mamre at Hebron (Gen 13,18). Cf. T. H. Robinson, *A History of Israel*, Oxford 1932, p. 56. This confirms that the 'oak of Moreh' lay well outside the city.

secession (1 Kgs 12,25). Also here 'in Shechem' meant: in the valley of Shechem and not near the town of Shechem.⁶⁰

4.5 'Shechem' parallel to valley of Succoth

In an old oracle preserved in two psalms, 'Shechem' is put in perfect parallelism with 'the valley of Succoth': "I, the Victor, will parcel out Shechem, and share out the Valley of Succoth" (both in Ps 60,6; 108,7). The implication is obvious: 'Shechem' itself stood for the valley rather, than for just the town. One can parcel out land, not a town.

4.6 The sanctuary at Shechem's link to Jacob

I believe that the tradition linking Yahweh's sanctuary to Jacob is additional proof of the thesis that it was situated in the valley itself. Gen 33,18-20 states that the sanctuary was a site where Jacob camped 'facing' or 'East of' the city of Shechem. He bought this site from the citizens of Shechem 'for a hundred *qeshîṭah*'. Reconstructing the possible locations of the site, we may, first of all, eliminate the Ebal and Gerazim. No shepherd with large flocks such as Jacob possessed would pitch his tent in such an unhandy place. Secondly, we may also eliminate the fertile plains and slopes around Shechem as they were certainly used for agriculture (see Jdg 9,27). This would only leave a place somewhat further into the valley, perhaps on a small hill in the eastern side of the valley 'facing' or 'opposite to' the city of Shechem.

In Gen 48,22, in an obvious allusion to the same site,⁶¹ Jacob is related as giving to Joseph rather than to his brothers 'one mountain slope' (*shechem aḥad*). This would also seem to refer, most naturally, to a mountain slope or hill within the valley of Shechem.

It might be objected that Yahweh's sanctuary had to be in the vicinity of the city of Shechem (*Tell Balatah*) since the two hill tops, the Ebal and the Gerazim which flank the city, played such an important role in the cult of the sanctuary (cf. Jdg 9,7; Dt 11,29; 27,4). However, a study of the precise role played by these mountains reveals that the objection cannot be sustained. In Jdg 9,7 we read that Jotham spoke his curse 'on the top of Mount Gerazim', while addressing the 'men of Shechem' who had come together in Yahweh's sanctuary to proclaim Abimelech king (Jdg 9,6). According to the ancient traditions preserved in Dt 27,11-13 six tribes should stand 'on Mount Gerazim'

⁶⁰ Even in post-exilic times the expression 'in Shechem' retained this wider meaning. Sir 50,26 calls the Samaritans "the foolish people that dwell in Shechem" – comparing them as a nation to nations such as the Philistines and the Edomites.

⁶¹ Three passages about the site seem to be related to one another. Gen 33,18-19 says that Jacob was encamped there and bought the place for "one hundred *qeshîṭâh*" from the sons of Chamôr. Jos 24,32 records that the bones of Joseph were buried in this same plot which Jacob had bought for "one hundred *qeshîṭâh*" at Shechem". In Gen 48,22 Jacob gives Joseph "one hilltop" (*shekem*) which he took from the Amorites "with my sword and my bow (*qashṭî*). Remembering that *qashṭî* could be spelled *qashṭî* (cf. Ps 60,6), we may see in all three texts aetiologies involving the root q-sh-ṭ.

to pronounce the blessings of the covenant and the six other tribes 'on Mount Ebal' to pronounce the curses of the covenant. If we were to take these texts literally, it would mean that, the two mountains served as ambos for cultic speakers. However, the position of the mountains excludes this. The two hill tops near *Tell Balatah*, the present Jebel-et-Tur and Jebel Eslamiyeh, are too far apart and too high above the valley (870 ft and 1080 ft respectively) to serve as cultic ambos.⁶² Moreover, if the location on these hilltops itself is thought to convey curse or blessing, we are up against inexplicable contradictions: how can the Gerazim first serve for a curse (Jdg 9,7) and then for blessing (Dt 11,29; 27,12)? Why is the Ebal the correct place for both the curse (Dt 11,29; 27,13) and for the altar of the covenant (Dt 27,4; Jos 8,30)? The suggestion that this confusion came about by ignorance or by the malice of a naughty scribe⁶³ does not seem to make sense.

Conclusion: all these considerations show that the sanctuary of the 'oak of the holy stone that is at Shechem' was situated somewhere within the valley of Shechem. But was there a connection with Shiloh?

4.7 The Septuagint at times equates the sanctuary at Shechem with Shiloh

According to the classic Hebrew text of the book of Joshua, Joshua renewed Yahweh's pact with Israel at the *sanctuary in Shechem*:

- "Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel together at Shechem ... and they presented themselves before God." (Jos 24,1).
- "That day Joshua made a covenant for the people; he laid down an ordinance and statute for them at Shechem." (Jos 24,25)
- "Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a great stone and set it up there, under the oak in the sanctuary of Yahweh" (Jos 24,26).

The Greek Septuagint translation places the same event *in Shiloh*.

- "Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel together *at Shiloh* ... and they presented themselves before God." (Jos 24,1).
- "That day Joshua made a covenant for the people; he laid down an ordinance and statute for them *in Shiloh before the tent of the God of Israel*." (Jos 24,25)
- "Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a great stone and set it up there, under the oak *before the Lord*" (Jos 24,26).

Why is the Septuagint reading different? It is not a simple mistake, because 'Shiloh' is mentioned instead of 'Shechem' in *two* places, both verse 1 and verse 25. Moreover, whereas in verse the classic Hebrew reads 'at Shechem', the Septuagint extends this

⁶² M. Noth

⁶³ J. Hempel, *Die althebräische Literatur*, Potsdam 1930, p. 90.

as ‘in Shiloh before the tent of the God of Israel’. The only sensible explanation is that the Septuagint translator translated from a different Hebrew version.⁶⁴ And remember that the Septuagint translation from Hebrew into Greek was produced during the last two centuries *before Christ*. It presupposes an old text indeed.

Does it not point to ancient Jewish sources seeing a link between Shechem and Shiloh, in fact considering the sanctuary of Yahweh in the valley of Shechem identical to the Tent of the God of Israel in Shiloh?

5. Reasons to possibly identify ancient Shiloh with *Ta’anath Shiloh*

5.1 Shiloh east of Shechem on the Madaba Map

This mosaic map in a Byzantine Church, dated between 542 and 570 AD, is the oldest known cartographic description of Palestine. It firmly places ancient Shiloh – “here once stood the Ark” – in the valley east of Shechem. This topographical location is routinely dismissed by authors as mistaken and confused.⁶⁵ However, the accuracy of the map has in recent years been demonstrated by correctly identifying the location of Askalon.⁶⁶ Excavations in 200 and 2010 have also confirmed the map’s accurate locations of the Nea Church, the *Cardo Maximus* and an ancient road in the map’s depiction of Jerusalem.⁶⁷

The Madaba Map’s location of ancient Shiloh may have been based on the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius (see no 1.2a above). It may also have had its own sources. The *Vitae Prophetarum* (100 AD?), for instance, which was composed by Jews who must have known the Holy Land, mentions that the prophet Ahijah was ‘buried near the oak of Shiloh’ (92.9f). Though not indicating an exact location for Shiloh, contemporaries must have attributed it to a specific place.⁶⁸

5.2 *Ta’anath Shiloh* in the valley of Shechem --- Jos 16,6

In Jos 16,6 we learn of a place called *tant šlh*, vocalised by the Massoretes as *ta’anath-shiloh*, rendered by the Septuagint as *thênath sêlô*. In modern translations the place is known as ‘Ta’anath-Shiloh’. Its location would satisfy the required conditions of Shiloh in the valley of Shechem. With the help of historical notes from Ptolemy and Eusebius and from the geographical data of the context Ta’anat-Shiloh is usually

⁶⁴ A. S. Peake, in *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. J. Hastings, vol. II, Edinburgh 1900, p. 784.

⁶⁵ M. Avi-Yonah, *The Madaba Mosaic Map with Introduction and Commentary*, Jerusalem 1954.

⁶⁶ J. Vogt, *Architekturmosaiken am Beispiel der drei Jordanischen Städte Madaba, Umm al-Rasas und Gerasa*, Greifswald 2004.

⁶⁷ K. Flower, ‘Architekturmosaiken am Beispiel der drei Jordanischen Städte Madaba, Umm al-Rasas und Gerasa’, *CNN* February 11, 2010.

⁶⁸ J. H. Charlesworth (Ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Vol. 2), London 1985, pp. 379-399; A. M. Schwemer, *Studien zu den frühjüdischen Prophetenlegenden Vitae Prophetarum*, vol 2, Tübingen 1996.

identified either with Khirbet Tana et-Tahta or Khirbet Tana el Fauqa, both of which lie east and south-east of Tell Balatah in the Valley of Shechem.⁶⁹

I am unaware of any attempt to explain the derivation of the name, but it seems, to me that a Ugaritic passage may throw light on the question. In the text Baal speaks to Anath in these words (verses 18 to 29):

“18. I've a word I fain would tell thee, 19. a speech I would utter to thee, 20. speech of tree and whisper of stone, 21. converse of heaven with earth, 22. even of the deep with the stars. 23. Yea, a thunderbolt unknown to heaven, 24. a word not known to men, 25. nor sensed by the masses on earth. 26. Come, pray, and I will reveal it 27. in the midst of my mount Godly Zaphon, 28. in the sanctuary, mount of my portion, 29. in the pleasance, the hill I possess.”⁷⁰

The Ugaritic original of verse 21 reads: *tant šmm °m arš*. The word 'tant' in vs. 21 is here rendered by 'conversation' on account of the context.⁷¹ If we were to bring the word in connection with the Hebrew root *tâ'* (room, parlour; cf. 3 Kgs 14,28; Ez 40,7ff.; Septuagint transliteration *thê*; cf. Assyrian *ta'u*), we might also understand it to mean 'meeting-place', 'parlour'. Ancient sanctuaries were, in fact, considered to be such points of contact between heaven and earth (cf. Gen 28,10-22; 11,4).⁷² In the Ugaritic text Baal is therefore inviting Anath to come to his holy mount, his sanctuary, the meeting place of heaven and earth,⁷³ where through the stone and the tree an oracle will be communicated to her.

Is it pure chance that the sanctuary in Shechem's valley possessed such a tree and such a stone? Should it not rather be seen as such an ancient 'meeting-place' between heaven and earth? This would explain why it is also called 'the navel of the land' and 'the diviners' oak' (Jdg 9,37), why it is the scene of oracles to Abram (Gen 12,7), to Jacob (Gen 35,1) and to the Shechemites (Jdg 9,7ff.)? Shiloh is also described as a meeting place in Psalm 78,60: “He forsook his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelt among people”.

Taanath Shiloh might, therefore, well fit as the holy place in the valley of Shechem, both on account of its position and on account of the implication of its name.

⁶⁹ F. M. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine*, Paris 1938, vol. II, p. 474; M. Du Buit, *Géographie de la Terre Sante*, Paris 1956, p. 226.

⁷⁰ 'nt:III:17-28; translation by H. L. Ginsberg in J. B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Princeton 1955, p. 136.

⁷¹ C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook: Grammar, Texts in Transliteration, Cuneiform Selections, Glossary, Indices* (Analecta Orientalia), Rome 1965; Glossary no 2507.

⁷² M. Eliade, *Traité de l'Histoire des Religions*, Paris 1959, pp. 201ff.

⁷³ In same instances, notably with the construct case of *bît*, the preposition *b* is omitted. Cf. C. H. Gordon, op. cit. no 10-4, p. 95.

5.3 Another reference to Shiloh near Shechem? --- Gen 33,18

In Gen 33,18 we find the following Massoretic vocalization: *wayyâbô ya°aqôb shâlem îr shekem 'asher be'ereş kena°an*. The Septuagint and the Vulgate render shalem as 'to Salim'. Many modern versions, following the Targum, read 'beshalôm', meaning 'safely , unscathed' (RSV; JB.; Powis-Smith; De Fraine). The text would then mean: "Jacob arrived safely at the town of Shechem in Canaanite territory". However, this reading does violence to the consonantal text.

Observing that Samaritanus and some other manuscripts presuppose the reading 'sh-l-o-m', I suggest the following vocalization: *wayyâbô ya°aqôb shilô - m - îr shekem*. This would mean: 'And Jacob reached Shiloh of the city of 'Shechem' (enclitic mem). The parallelism with Gen 12,6 is striking: 'Abram came to the sanctuary (*meqôm*: status constructus) of Shechem. The text would, therefore, seem to imply that Shiloh is the sanctuary near the city of Shechem. From Gen 33,19 we learn further that, the site of Jacob's encampment, and consequently of Shiloh, was 'facing the city of Shechem', probably meaning 'East of Shechem', and certainly implying that it was not on the Ebal or Gerazim, but rather in the valley itself, facing Shechem across the open space of the valley.

A. Alt has drawn attention to the extraordinary fact that "Shiloh the early prominence of which as centre of Jahwistic worship cannot be doubted" seems all the same devoid of vital relationships with the patriarchs.⁷⁴ And yet we know that it was the 'God of Israel' who gave oracles at Shiloh (cf. 1 Sm 1,17; 2,30), that Yahweh's decrees promulgated at Shiloh (cf. Ps 78,5 and 78,60) were 'decrees for Jacob'. In other words: as amphictyonic centre Shiloh almost had to have had vital connections with Jacob. If our vocalization of Gen 33,18a is correct, Gen 3,18b-19 would provide the link between Jacob, Shiloh and Shechem.

Overall conclusion

Shiloh in the valley of Shechem? It would certainly make supreme sense in the light of the earliest covenantal renewal ceremonies celebrated in the North, as my studies have shown.⁷⁵ Once every seven years, probably during the Sabbatical Year (Lev 25,1-7), the tribes would gather at Transjordanian Succoth to re-live the forty years in the desert by celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant. There they would be given instructions on the covenant with Yahweh and on new legislation that would form part of the covenant. To re-enact the crossing of the Red Sea and the landgiving, the Ark would then be carried, ahead of the people, across the Jordan into the valley of Shechem. After depositing the Ark in its sanctuary

⁷⁴ A. Alt, *Der Gott der Väter*, 1929, p. 64 (see also pp. 59f.). *Kleine Schriften I*, 1953, p. 78.

⁷⁵ J. Wijngaards, *The Dramatization of Salvific History in the Deuteronomical Schools*, *Oudtestamentische Studien*, vol.xvi, Brill, Leiden 1969; summary description of the Northern rituals on pp. 109-113.

at Shiloh, the people would then formally renew the covenant by calling on themselves the blessings and curses of the covenant. Portions of the land would then be re-allocated, or re-affirmed, to the tribes at Shiloh before they would return to their own provinces (Josh 13,8 – 17,18).

Taking everything into consideration, it seems certainly possible, if not likely, that the ancient pre-monarchic sanctuary of Shiloh lay in the valley of Shechem.

John Wijngaards

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