Dr. Aryeh Leib Vilsker[1] [1919-1988], son in law of Rav Menachem Mendel Gluskin

Dr. Aryeh (Leib in Yiddish) son of Chaim Vilsker was a son in law of Rav Menachem Mendel Gluskin. Dr. Vilsker was married to Rav Gluskin's daughter Dr. Gita Gluskina Vilksker. Gita's and Aryeh's son Emanuel retained the name Gluskin as Dr. Emanuel Gluskin. Rav Menachem only had daughters, and in order to continue the Gluskin name Dr. Emanuel, an electrical engineer goes by the surname "Gluskin". A second son of Gita and Aryeh Vilsker is Boris.

According to documents Vilsker was Leib Haimovich, in Russian Lev Yefimovich, and in Israel, Arie Vilsker. Vilsker was born in 1919 in Shumsk Vohlyn province, then Poland and now in the Tarnopol region in Ukraine. He also used the pen name Leib Shumsky after the place of his birth. His father was the owner of a seltzer water plant. Lev attended a Chalutzim Zionist school and when a teenager he took hachshara - technical training for Aliyah. He trained to become a mechanic in Eretz Yisrael.[2] Lev continued singing the Chalutznick Zionist songs throughout his life and was known to stroll throughout St. Petersburg singing these songs.

Lev studied with his two grandfathers who were both Talmudic scholars. Later a Talmud teacher was employed but his grandfathers also continued teaching and testing Lev on Friday at the end of the week. Meanwhile a grandmother would invite Leibele to another room where she secretly gave him a small glass of wine and a piece of lekach - honey cake so that he had a good taste with his learning.

While food may have an incentive he later studied lishma – purely for the sake of learning. His mother would show the Talmud teacher respect and honor always preparing a glass of tea for the teacher. The Melamed would say, “Gemarah never cools down, yet tea cools down.” Di Gemorah vet nit kalt verin, oon dee tay vet kalt vern.” The Talmud teacher initiated Vilsker into the rhythms, the warp and woof of the Aramaic of the Talmud Bavli with its sing song cadences of מנא הני מלי (what does this mean?) and מנא יאני מלאי (how do we know this?).

At the age of 20 after the Western Ukraine was annexed by the Soviet Union, Lev was drafted into the army and sent to the Far East. There he suffered from varicose veins and sores and was admitted to a military hospital. When the war broke out he was enlisted as a military railway man, first in Galichi and then in Estonia.

As a perk of military service Lev was able to petition to study in University. Lev thus went to Leningrad to study at the University. First he entered the French Department of the Institute of Foreign Languages. Eighteen months later Lev transferred to the Department of Assyriology and Ancient Near East at the Institute of Oriental Studies of Leningrad University. And thus Lev’s good foundation of Hebrew and Aramaic from his youth re-entered his life. His student colleagues included Misha, a future professor at Haifa University, Michael Geltser and my aunt Gita Gluskina who wrote her dissertation on the work of Rabbi Yehudah Alharizi, author of Techakemoni and a translation of the Rambam’s Moreh Nevukhim.

In January of 1949 Lev proposed to Gita Gluskina and in December of 1949 their son Emmanuel was born. Emanuel is a doctor of Electrical Engineering in Israel and has sons in Kollel in Jerusalem.
In 1950 Lev graduated from the University with a diploma of Linguist-Semitologist. He received a position in the State Public Library named after ME Saltykov Shedin at the department of Hebrew and Yiddish books. The department was later renamed the Department of literatures of Asia and Africa. There he was renamed Lev Yefimovich by the staff. He was a librarian and advanced to senior editor and senior researcher.

Professor Vinikov wrote a letter of recommendation in Russian. The letter was saved by Dr. Vilsker and later relayed to his son Dr. Emanuel Gluskin.

Letter of Recommendation translated:

Vilsker, L. H, born in 1919, had entered the Oriental Department of Leningrad State University (named after L. A. Zhdanov and awarded the State medal after Lenin) as a second-year student of the Division of Assyriology and Hebraistics in 1996. Before that, Vilsker had attended the Leningrad Pedagogical Institute of Foreign languages/. L. H. Vilsker have been seriously studying the Semitic languages /Arabic, ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, Syrian/ and he also devoted a lot of attention to philosophy and history by taking a number of both general and special courses of lectures, and by conducting an extensive review of literature. In addition, comrade Vilsker has been studying independently the recently found Ugarit manuscripts that represent the extremely important cultural monuments. These resulted in his course project, “Laryngeal sounds in Ugarit language,” which demonstrates a profoundness of the author’s approach to the analysis of the poorly understood and complex linguistic problems.

He dedicated his Diploma project to the word-formation in Hebrew language — this is a question of considerable interest for linguistics, which was not explored properly by science. This Diploma project had received the highest praise from the Committee of the Department of Arabic Philology in May of 1950.

The solid training received by comrade Vilsker at the University, as well as completion by him, independently, the serious scientific works mentioned above, give reason to believe that he is thoroughly prepared for conducting scientific work and scientific research.

Senior researcher of Institute of Oriental Studies of Academy of Sciences, USSR

Professor Vinikov

Despite excellent recommendations, his scholarly life was not easy, particularly with the lack of publishing opportunities in Russia. He was an unknown entity. How could anyone know about the Russian Hebrew philologist Lev Vilsker if there was nowhere for him to be published? He was known to some extent at the Leningrad State Public Library where Vilsker worked for almost 30 years. Naturally he was admired by other Hebraists and friends including Alex Tarn,[3] James Lieberman,[4] and Eliezer Rabinovitch.[5] Teaching positions were rarer than publishing opportunities, recalling for us Gershom Scholem’s assessment of the situation in
Germany during his doctoral studies. Clearly the lack of Jewish studies opportunities was much more severe in Communist Russia than in pre-Nazi Germany.

Dr. Ezra Fleischer, expert in Medieval Hebrew poetry, and pioneer of the Hebrew poems in the Cairo Geniza, memorialized the following about Vilsker in the Yediot Achronot on March 13, 1988:

“The passing of Leo Vilsker is a great loss. Our world mourns not just the important research of this great man, an aristocrat of spirit, who was a messenger from an unfriendly country that persecuted him and Jewish scholarship. Leo Vilsker was a colleague with a generous and selfless soul. Many Israeli scientists have lost a friend who inspired us from afar (in Leningrad) with his never tiring research and quest for understanding, with his fiery supreme creative passion, and who at the same time astounded us with his knowledge, and rare modesty.”

The scholarly journal Kiryat Sefer, featured Vilsker’s photo portrait with a long article by Professor Fleischer dedicated to the Vilsker’s discovery of unpublished poems of Rav Yehudah HaLevy and Rav HaLevy’s friendship with Rabbi Moshe ibn Ezra. The article had already been sent for printing when a message about the sudden death of Lev Vilsker arrived from Leningrad.

Professor Fleischer hastened to make necessary changes in the introduction, main text, and footnotes from present to past tense. The editors accepted Fleischer’s request to include a special page with a photo of Vilsker. The publishing of a photo in Kiryat Sefer was the first time in the 62 year history of the journal since it was first published since 1926. In the photo Vilsker is wearing a white sweater that he inherited from his scholarly brother-in-law Joseph Amusin[7] who married Leah Gluskina Amusin,[8] the sister of Vilsker’s wife Gita Gluskina.[9]

In the article by Dr. Fleischer focus was upon the youthful years of Yehuda HaLevy and to the beginning of his friendship with Rabbi Moses ibn Ezra, a venerable poet. The subtitle reads, “according to the research of Arie Vilsker.” After Vilsker’s passing there was a tidal wave of popular newspaper articles and scholarly publications broadcasting the importance of Vilsker’s research.

Back in Russia the passing of Vilsker was marked by a number of obituaries that really did not capture the importance of Vilsker’s research for Jewish studies. However relatively a more comprehensive acknowledgement of the impact of Vilskers research did appear in Journal “Sovietish Heimland” (Soviet motherland), No 5, May 1988, Translated by L. Belov on July 6th 1988, Jerusalem and reads:

**Obituary for Vilsker**

In the beginning of 70’s, there was a publication by a new author in the journal “Sovietish Heimland.” The readers were immediately captivated by the unusual character of his materials that were published generally under the rubric “Our announcements.” It is possible to recognize the wide diapason of the author’s research by mentioning only some titles of his papers: “New materials for the History of Jews in
Leib Vilsker was born in 1919 in a small town of Shumsk of Tarnopol region in Ukraine. From 1940 and till the end of WWII, he served in the Soviet Army. In 1950, he had completed his studies at the Department of Semitology and Hebraistics of the Leningrad University. For several years he was in charge of the Department of Semitology at the Leningrad Public Library named after M. E. Saltykov-Shedrin. In 1970, he had defended his dissertation, “Samaritan Language” and received a degree of “candidate of philological sciences.” When this dissertation was published as a book in 1974, it was highly appreciated as an important study in semitology as well as a significant contribution to research in the history of Samaritans.

By dedicating his life to the problems of ancient Hebrew literature, Vilsker chose an unbeaten path. Each of his works, undoubtedly, manifests a unique discovery. Almost all his research papers that were published in the journal “Sovietish Heimland,” have been reprinted in Jewish and Hebrew press abroad, particularly his works about Yehuda Ha-Levi.

As a scientist, Leib Vilsker accomplished a lot in the field of deciphering unknown ancient Jewish texts that are located in the library archives in our country [Russia] and which nobody but him was able to study with such competence and pedantic attention to details. In this field, his work has the extreme significance for the world culture.

Several of Vilskers works were left unfinished, on his desk. A few days before he died, he had sent to the journal an article about the unknown letters of C. N. Bialik, which Vilsker had been working on during last few months of his life.

“Sovietish Heimland” has published two collections of L. Vilsker’s works, which were added to the journal publications under the name “Discovered Treasures,” and which included only some of his research papers; both these small books made a strong impression on readers. One can tell with confidence that there will be in the future no researchers of ancient Jewish literature, who will be able to work without the discoveries made by L. Vilsker. For the history of ancient Jewish literature, his discoveries have made an invaluable contribution.

In bright memory of Vilsker

Journal “Sovietish Heimland” (Soviet motherland), No 5, May 1988

Translation from Hebrew to Russian by L. Belov July 6th 1988, Jerusalem
Unfortunately while Vilsker was alive his fame in Israel where he had never been able to get a VISA out of Russia to go to, was obscured due to the difficulties of publishing Jewish related subjects in Russia. Such research during Vilsker’s lifetime was not a priority and definitely frowned upon.

Vilsker influenced the work of colleagues such as Chaim Ratshabi, Nechemiah Aloni, Yosef Yahalom, Dov Yarden, and of course Ezra Fleischer. Fleischer referred to Vilsker as “the genius” (ha-iluey). Shulamit Shalit refers to Fleischer as Vilsker’s “guardian angel” analogously as Dov Boris Gaponova’s guardian angel in the area of belles lettres was Abraham Shlionsky who published a translation of the Hebrew Georgian epic, “The Knight in the Panther’s skin” of Rustaveli.[10]

Shalit shows how Vilsker was relatively unknown, he faced discrimination in Russia against Jewish scholarly matters in general which trickled down to his workplace the Leningrad State Public Library, named after ME Saltykov –Shedrin. Shalit touches upon the great persecution of Jews under Soviet Hegemony. She writes, “In 1962 in Leningrad Vilsker visited a cousin of Gita, an Israeli. Gita says, “Leib went to hold her on the street and they met other people from the Israeli group, one of the KGB photographed them. And for the “communication with foreigners”, the head of the library, a hefty anti-Semite removed Vilsker from the department, where he worked in the specialty of Oriental Manuscripts, and was transferred to the acquisitions department.

The discomfort of surveillance [11] under the Communists manifested itself throughout the Vilsker family as it did for many Soviet Jews. Gita Gluskina Vilsker told Shulamith Shalit: “At various times she and Lev were summoned by the authorities. He was "asked" to collect readers' conversations. "What kind of readers?" - He asked in response. - "But there are Jewish elders that visit your library – they dig in the Talmud and other religious literature, they converse..." And then he [the official] added that Vilsker must keep this conversation secret. Vilsker replied: "I have no secrets from my wife." He paused and added: "You know, everyone has his vocation, profession. You cannot do my job, and I cannot do yours." After that, Lev was not summoned anymore.

As for Gita – this is a different story.” Gita’s sister Esther joined Hashomer Hatzair and was sent to Siberia for her Zionist activities. Although Hashomer Hatzair was a secular Zionist organization, in Russia there was not differentiation, for a Zionist was a Zionist of any political stripe. Thus the Baal Ha Tanya was arrested because of sending funds to Eretz Yisrael and the date of his release is celebrated by Chabad Lubavitch to this day as a national and religious holiday.

The pattern of the Baal HaTanya’s arrest under the Tsars, repeated itself in a different modality under the communists when Rav Menachem Mendel Gluskin (father of Gita Gluskina Vilsker) and his father-in-law Rabbi Eliezer Rabinowitch were arrested for religious activities. The Rabbis were kept awake for forty-eight hours and then made to sign a false declaration that there is no religious persecution in Russia.
Rav Gluskin’s flock tried to bring their Rabbi his tallis and tefillin but the communists would not allow this, as the state was opposed to all religious activities amongst not only Jews but also Christians in their religion less state which Marx had warned against in proclaiming “religion as the opiate of the masses.” Marx’s vision was that of secular messianism, and as George Orwell shows in Animal Farm, and elsewhere, that it is a failed secular messianism. Hobbes had advocated for a large bureaucratic state when he witnessed mob violence in a state of civil war. Thus the liberal communist state as a Leviathan bureaucracy, an Egyptian bureaucracy of old, was born.

However persecution of Jews ensued needless to say not from the radical left of Stalinist Russia. Among them were incidents like “the doctor’s plot” when Stalin feared Jewish doctors were trying to poison him, and the phenomena of the “Beilis case” which tapped into a 2000 year old blood libel accusation. Obviously dangers are documented from the radical right of the Nazi National Socialist party which also was run by a large bureaucratic state that fused the mastery of technology for example in rail transport and construction of crematoria, according to Richard Rubinstein, in the form of “techno-cracy” (technology + bureaucracy). More on technocracy in Judaica Librarianship can be found in the last section of this paper.

Even in ‘exile’ working in Acquisitions Leo was able to bring forth invaluable library knowledge. By keeping his thoughts with Judaic, Hebraic and Semitic linguistics, he ordered books from many foreign countries. When the researchers from abroad came to the library, they were stunned by Vilsker’s breadth, depth, and genius. [12] He also became acquainted with the scientific avenues in various fields. Thanks to Lev Vilsker the library collection in Jewish subjects in Leningrad turned to be much richer than in Moscow! Moscow also had a great collection known as the Gunzberg collection from which many recent reprints of obscure Rishonim have been made.

Five years later, a new head of the department categorically demanded to bring Vilsker back, for without him, the entire special collection became "stripped."

In 1979 Visker enjoyed a banquet in honor of his 60th anniversary. That evening, he heard a lot of good things. The next morning he was asked to retire. [13] Before his retirements the library celebrated the 200th anniversary of the birth of A.S. Firkowicz. During the conference for the 200th anniversary Vilkser announced and presented the inscription of a slab that was carved in the Samaritan language [14] dating to 383 CE. The slab was collected by Firkowicz. Such contributions however were somewhat forgotten and Vilsker was forced to retire.

He was full of energy, on the wings of love from all people around him. He looked (Gita reiterates) young and very handsome. But here came the hit! While on retirement, he learned that he could get another 12 rubles, in addition to the 120 rubles of pension (SSI), if he gets involved in a manual labor for a few months. He found a job of a simple bookbinder.

Shulamit Shalit further notes, “But then something unforeseen happened. In a talented person, a confluence of bitter circumstances may, often unexpectedly, uncover new hidden properties of the soul, mind, and character.”
When Lev Efimovich would "stumble" on a poem, he did not know whether it was known to the world or was it a discovery. It was risky to publicly declare a discovery of the poem, and it was premature to publish about it. What if the poem was already published in some unknown edition?

What did he do? He would write down the first line, only a single line, and send it in a letter to Israel, to Ezra Fleischer; Vilsker knew that prof. Fleischer was the pre-eminent specialist in medieval Hebrew poetry. The venerable professor, extremely excited, would rush, like a high-spirited young man, to Heichal Shlomo in Jerusalem to dig for hours in a huge catalogue containing records of all famous poems of medieval poets, and then send a response to Leningrad.

No! Nope! Unpublished! In this way Vilsker discovers not one or two, but as many as twenty-two completely unknown poems of the great Yehuda ha-Levy. He analyses them and publishes his findings, with great difficulties, in the "Sovietish Heimland" journal, that is, in Yiddish, while feeling undisguised suspicion towards himself. Gita's reminiscences: "Lev was not a poet, but he was forced by the circumstances to make translations into Yiddish of the words by the great Yehuda ha-Levy! The journal was terribly afraid of any word in Hebrew.

As an honest researcher, Lev would supplant the translation with a photocopy of an original. An editorial board's footnote would say: "Original photo was omitted because of the lack of space." But there was an instance when, either by mistake or because the superiors were not present, one fragment facsimile in Hebrew was printed in the journal and the happy scientists in Israel, among them Ezra Fleischer, examined and studied every letter in it. What a story!

The first publication of Lev Vilsker's research about the unknown poems of Yehuda ha-Levy (born not later than 1075 - died in 1141) appeared in the February issue of the "Sovietish Heimland" journal, in 1982. Eight pages altogether. On April 7, there was an announcement about the publication in Israeli newspaper "Maariv".

Among those who first responded to this terrific publication were such connoisseurs of medieval poetry and literary historians and experts in Yiddish and Hebrew as Yosef Chaim Crunch and Nagid, Yeḥuda Ratshabi David Losifon, Dov Yarden and Nechemiah Aloni. The sensation literally rocked the whole scientific world.

Newspapers were first to respond followed by serious journals. The precious treasure was not buried somewhere in a wilderness in a corner of the earth, not in a cave, but in one of the centers of the civilized world. Many rave responses and reviews reached the author. Inspired by them, Vilsker directed his intelligence and passion of a pioneer on the continued search and analysis of the findings. A year later, he published a new and almost twenty-page long article entitled "198 poems of Yehuda ha-Levy in unknown edition." This is how the term "Vilsker List" had appeared in the scientific literature, for among the mentioned 198 “first lines” of the works of Yehuda ha-Levy, 111 were not mentioned in any other indexes, including the classic catalog by Shmuel David Luzzatto, that had been studied by the scientists for more than 150 years.
Among the first who responded to the first and the second publication of Vilsker in "Sovietish Heimland" was a rabbi and scholar David Yosifon, who, among other things, was the editor of three volumes - the books of Tanakh (Torah, Prophets, Writings) - with a translation into Russian (published by "Mossad ha-Rav Kook" in 1978). Perhaps you have it on your bookshelf. Originally from Poland, David Yosifon knew both Russian and Yiddish. David Yosifon wrote his second article for the newspaper "Hatzofe" on his deathbed. His relatives had sent the article to an editor along with his letter: "I am writing these words in a hospital fortress "Hadassa," after a major surgery. It turned out that while walking on Jaffa Street, I fell and lost consciousness. Even though I cannot yet get out of bed, I think that this is my duty and pleasure to tell you that the scientist Leib Vilsker, from Leningrad, who made a new discovery and has written about it in "Sovietish Heimland." I want and must ask for the attention of all the scientists and researchers towards that fact."

It was his last letter, words of greeting from one scientist to another across the Iron Curtain. Of course, they [Vilsker and Yosifon] were not acquaintances. Later on, others referenced the article by David Yosifon. It is intelligent, insightful, and full of light and love.

In the similar way, “while descending to a grave” (in 1983), Professor Nechemiah Aloni had blessed Vilsker and his labors. That was a reaction to the first article by Vilsker. Professor Aloni wrote in a journal “Sinai”(number 93), "We are waiting with great impatience (bekilyon eynaim) a continuation of his [Vilsker’s] work in all its brilliance and depth. We learned more from his concise article than from the thick-winded volumes of other voluble authors." After enumerating orderly the seven discoveries of Vilsker in the eight-page article, while giving them a clear scientific analysis, Aloni adds, "... and the most important discovery is the author himself, who, until yesterday, was not listed among the researcher-experts in the works of Yehuda ha-Levi but who had become the one from today."

A great scientific discovery gives impetus to an entire scientific field and entails an avalanche of new investigations and publications. Lev Vilsker managed to publish three more articles (altogether five), but he had already written the sixth paper that came out after his death. Professor Yosef Yahalom writes: "In the last article, Vilsker presents for the first time the entirely message of ha-Levy to his great patron in Granada, the poet Moshe Ibn Ezra, but ... in Yiddish. The text of the Hebrew original of this important manuscript was prohibited for printing, and the death of Vilsker had closed the last window through which we looked furtively, almost like thieves, into the world of Hebrew manuscripts in Leningrad, which was unknown to us." I hear in these words both anger and bitterness; don't we completely agree with them, while pondering over the fate of such scholars and heroes as Lev Vilsker, Joseph Amusin,[15] and many others? Once the Iron Curtain fell, the notable Yosef Yahalom hurried to Leningrad; he then told about the trip and about how he was getting acquainted with the "treasure" of Vilsker ("Peamim" journal, number 46-7, 1991).

Now let us return to Nechemiah Aloni. He named the poem of Yehuda ha-Levy about pogrom in Toledo in the XII century, the fourth discovery in the first article by Vilsker. Aloni writes that
the historians knew about the anti-Jewish pogroms perpetrated by Muslims in southern Spain. "I wondered why until now there have been no studies on eulogies (mournful songs) in the works of Yehuda ha-Levy. And here came Vilsker and presented us with a new poem filled with the clear hints about participation of northern Christians in the pogroms. He presents two expressions that were competently treated by Vilsker: "am seir" (hairy) – most likely that was a nickname for Christians; and "Yad Esau"- the hand of Esau (recalling his hairiness) that could be a hint about Christians as well.

The poem is called "On the pogrom in Toledo." Let me give you a rough translation into Russian, so that the poem content would become clear for the reader. The phonetics of each trope in Hebrew (each stanza ends with the word "day" - yom) is given in the transcription by Shulamith Shalit below.

Да не знать вам, мне внемлющие,/ О горе моем слышащие,/ Живущие в этот День.

Спросите, если не слышали,/ Поведаю, если не знаете,/ Обратите сердца ваши в тот День.

Вам откроется, как пришла беда,/ Как злосчастье на нас обрушилось/ И в чем грех состоял наш – в тот День.

Знают пусть Ариэля изгнанники:/ (то есть, Иерусалима) Вот, еще одно колено Израиля/ Отрублено в тот День.

Госпожой я была, избранницей,/ Средь сестер своих по изгнанию,/ Пока не нагрянул тот День...

Then the poem develops a topic of the former prosperity: Jews lived in Seira, in Christian Spain, in prosperity and benevolence, their children were counselors for the kings, their elders looked regal and stately, everybody studied Torah, observed the Jewish laws, and lived in peace with the neighbors - "And Esau's hand was with me," but “in his heart, he dreamed about evil deeds, he was thinking about my blood every day."

Here is how Yehuda ha-Levi sounds in Hebrew:

Lo Aleichem shomey Shimi / hamitaablim al-Nigi / Chaim kulchem ha-yom.

Shaaltem shmaatem lo / lo agidchem hem yedaatem / sim levavchem minutes ha-yom.

Ned nirdefa eich kalta / ha-paa-in BAME Hite / hachataat hazot ha-yom.

Ve-hodiyu golaten Ariel / ki Shevet E-Israel / Nowhere ha-yom ...

The fifth discovery, according Aloni, is a song of love "Yonim Yaronu." Here is a brief story. When this song was not known yet in Israel, Vilsker’ friend in Leningrad, the composer Hirsch Paikin, created music for the poem, whereas his wife, Clara Yakovlevna, performed the song. At that time, they both started learning Hebrew with Vilsker, secretly. Inspired by the work of the scientist, Paikin wrote a lot of music for the poems by Yehuda ha-Levy and he even composed an opera about this great poet. They performed this repertoire on many occasions in Israel. But
the Paikins are not anymore. Clara Yakovlevna managed to send me from Jerusalem a cassette recording of their songs. I am obliged to simply convey you the words:

Yonim Yaron kamoni kachem / Al Bein MASHAV zaaku Mei Mayhew / Homim al Yamim halhu bli chemda / Uzman peerud Chalaf ki bi-Mayhew / (Here performers repeat the first two lines as the chorus).

Ve-ezkor Dodi dadey Yonati / Ki Emergency aloft bosmeychem alai ... (Doves are cooing, and I am like them / Here is the watering. And the waters are pure and they murmur like a sea. /Joyless is my wandering. It's time to part. / Doves are cooing. I remember my little dove, the scent of her breasts.[17] /

This is clearly a reference to the metaphor of the beloved [dodi] in the Kabbalah Shabbos hymn, Lechah dodi, which itself refers to Shir Hashirim’s numerous allusions to doves (yonim). Rashi follows in the footsteps of Rabbi Akiva who refers to Shir HaShirim as a metaphor for the Kodesh Kodeshim.[18] In fact Rashi sees the whole poem as a reference for the Beit Hamikash which factors the Song as a metaphor for Hashem’s love of his people Am Yisrael. Not only does the verse repeat twice Shuvi Shuvi HaShulamith[19] an allusion to “if only the Jews would observe two shabbatot according to Hashem’s ratzon, then the Mashiach would arrive, but the olfactory metaphors of myrrh, cinnamon, and nerd also evoke the Ketoret ha Samim. Thus it is not accidental that the Satmar Rav evoking the 3 vows of Shir HaShirim cites the verse of the 3 vows, to warn against making aliya en masse, to go up the homah, as forcing the end (dochek et ha-ketz) in reference to eschatological reckoning of the “ingathering of the exiles.”

Regarding the image of the “yona” For example (Song of Songs 1:13-17)

13 My beloved is unto me as a bag of myrrh, that lies between my breasts. [20]
14 My beloved is unto me as a cluster of henna in the vineyards of Ein-Gedi. {S}
15 Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thine eyes are as doves.
16 Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant; also our couch is leafy.
17 The beams of our houses are cedars, and our panels are cypresses.

Further in 2: 14 we again encounter the metaphor of the dove, a bird of peace let out by Noach after the flood.

14 O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.
Again in 4:1 the metaphor of the dove is evoked in the Song.

Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thine eyes are as doves behind thy veil; thy hair is as a flock of goats, that trail down from mount Gilead.

In Chapter 5 the image of the dove again tropes this time associated with the voice of the beloved knocking (Kol Dodi Dofek) the name of Rav Soloveitchik’s famous statement of supporting Medinat Eretz Yisrael as a statement of alliance with the cause of religious Zionism:

My dove, my undefiled, is but one; she is the only one of her mother; she is the choice one of her that bore her. The daughters saw her, and called her happy; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.

We have mentioned already the name of Abraham Firkowicz. A lover of antiquities, he traveled extensively in different countries of the Middle East. At the end of the XIX century, he sold to the Leningrad (then Imperial Public) Library two collections that were particularly valuable thanks to the manuscripts from the Cairo Geniza. Abraham Harkavi, Paul Kokovtsov, and prof. Khvolson worked with the manuscripts. Scientists from different countries used to come to have a chance to just take a look at the collection.

Now Vilsker decided to "to delve into them." Being free from a job, he directed all his energies to the study of Jewish texts of the collection. He was well versed in different handwritings and fonts and he had a sharp eye for the things that were left unnoticed by others. And his labor was bringing discoveries almost every day. He felt that he had found unknown poetry of the medieval Jewish poets, including poems of Yehuda ha-Levi, but he could not know that for sure.

Yet Dr. Chaim Vilsker who was the librarian of the St. Petersberg Saltykov Library Jewish division including the Firkovitch and Antonin Judaica Collections, where the scholar/librarian found unpublished poems in manuscript form of Rabbi Yehudah HaLevy which he later annotated and published in Yiddish journals, certainly gave much more than was appreciated by the government library. Dr. Isadore Twerski tried to bring Dr. Vilsker to the Harvard Wiedner collection of Judaica, with a joint appointment to lecture on the holdings of the Saltykov library, but could not secure a visa for the scholar/librarian.

Shulamit Shalit writes of this connection with Harvard by noting:
When E. Fleischer was visiting the United States for his research for a whole year, he decided to organize a trip for Vilsker to the United States. Finally, he would meet with the dear friend, if not in Israel then in the United States, on the neutral ground. Lev Efimovich was delighted with the official invitation from Harvard University to read lectures about the collection of Hebrew manuscripts in the Leningrad Public Library. He decided to tempt the fate. He was redirected from one office to another, and then to another... He came, he wrote, he was refused, and he continued coming again. Oh, dear naive Professor Fleischer! Maybe it was not worth to start this fight, a fight with not the windmills [24] – but with the reinforced-concrete Soviet mills...

On February 12, 1988, Lev Vilsker celebrated his birthday. He turned 69 years old. A few days later he sent his sixth article to Moscow, to the "Sovietish Heimland." On February 19th at 5:00 am, Dr. Vilsker experienced a sharp pain in his chest. A doctor made a direct injection into the heart. But that was wrong. Vilsker managed to say clearly his last words: "Bring a chair for the doctor..."[25]

The earthly life of Leib son of Chaim Vilsker, - Lev Yefimovich in the Soviet Russia, and Arie Vilsker in Israel, - had ended. His eldest son, Emiko, Emmanuel, had been living in Israel for thirteen years already. The younger son, Boris, with his mother Gita, wife Katya and two sons had relocated there in 1990. The grandchildren Misha and Sasha grew up and served in the army. The life of the name - Arie Vilsker – has just begun in Israel, in the world of science.

Vilsker wrote countless items (100 have been identified) in Russian and other European languages on a great breadth and depth of subjects. Vilsker scorned narrow specialization and his knowledge was broad and immense. His works on ancient manuscripts found in the Dead Sea area and the linguistic works on various Semitic languages, as well as his work in lexicography were just a few of his accomplishments. A total of 100 scientific papers have been ascribed to Vilsker but he had no place often to publish his findings. Some were published in Yiddish in the journal Sovietish Heimland, but it was not easy for Vilsker to “find a place and forum to share his research.”

However RAMBI only retains 2 items relating to Vilskers’ work on the Samaritans[26] and their language: “On Leib H. Vilsker Manuel D’arameeen Samaritain translated from Russian by J. Margain in Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Sceintifique, 1981, reviewed by Maurice Baillet in Journal of Near Eastern Studies 42, 4 (1983), p. 295-297. Yes, Vilsker taught himself as an auto-didact Samaritan language and Samaritan graphics. The Samaritan language’s roots can be traced to the paleo-Jewish alphabet. This subject was not taught in the University where Vilksner studies and thus his auto-didactism is remarkable in that he mastered the language on his own.

Vilsker came to be recognized as a leading Samaratologist. From the abstract of his dissertation “.... Samaritan manuscript collection of the State Public Library consisting of 18,600 sheets of parchment and paper in addition to scrolls as well as inscriptions on stone, silk, and copper.” Professor Victor Lebedev the former curator of the Jewish-Arab manuscripts, an area of Vilsker’s wife speciality Gita Gluskina, who made Aliyah, wrote in the “Alef-Beit” Magazine that Vilsker studied all 18600 sheets “never missing a single one” out of systematic dedication
and diligence. Dr. Gita Gluskin notes in a letter, “In the 1970 Lev had defended his thesis and received the degree of candidate of philological sciences. In 1974 his book Samaritan language was published by a Scientific research Institute and soon translated into French (Paris 1981). Remarkably while working on the Samaritan manuscripts Lev had completed a detailed catalog of these manuscripts which was published four years after his death in 1992.

Baillet notes that Vilsker was a disciple of I.N. Vinnikov. The review notes that Vilsker’s work replaces and trumped that of J. Rosenberg, Lehrbuch der Samaritanische Sprache und Literatur (Vienne, 1901). Baillet notes that the origin of that which one calls “Samaritain” is in effect from Occidental Arameen which in historical evolution is successively fused with Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic forms and idioms over the ages. Baillet notes that pages 11-20 give a history of the Samaritans, situated their dialect in the milieu of Arameen, tracing the lines of linguistic evolution. Baillet says the core of the book is pages 21 to 96 focusing on the literature, phonetics, morphology, syntax and lexique of the Samaritan evolved language process. The appendices (p.97-108) give two examples of calligraphic writings and cursive script and two tables of their evolution, with five examples of texts. Pages 111-118 offer a bibliography providing 153 titles and furnishing a list of Samaritan Manuscripts conserved in the Soviet Union. A map is given where these manuscripts are located geographically.

For Vilsker 2 Kings 17:24 is a key text. For Vilsker this verse signifies the arrival of the language of Arameen into Israel. Vilsker (pages 91-92) describes the influence of Hebrew on the Arameen lexicon and their adoption of the “Hebraic law” through their interaction with the Hebrews of the land of Judaea. Baillet writes, “La naissance du Targum est d’ailleurs situee par Vilsker bein avant l’ere chretienne (p.16), ce qui reste surprenant.”

Vilsker then enumerates the other great sources namely Le Mimar Marqe, the Aramaic liturgical poems, Asatir histories, and inscriptions- about 20 of which are in Arameen. The writing derives from the ancient Hebrew alphabet before the Masoretic script. Baillet notes that Vilsker did a good job on the section on morphology, syntax, and lexigraphical aspects of the Arameen language. Baillet notes that thanks to the work, The Literary and Oral Tradition of Hebrew and Aramaic amongst the Samaritans, vol. 3, pt. 2, The Recitation of Prayers and Hymns (Jerusalem, 1967) of Z. Ben – Hayyim, the phonetical transcription to give the pronunciation of the ancient language for the reader was made possible. Paul Kahle in his Der hebraischer Bibeltext, had raised the question of how the Tiberian masoretes, namely the Ben Asher family arrived at the correct authoritative pronunciation of the biblical text, as opposed to the pronunciations used by the Samaritans.

Kahle writes: Die Samaritaner haben eine Aussprache des Hebraischen bis auf den heutigen Tag festgehalten, welche die palaestinische Punktation in alten Geniza-Fragmenten einst auch fuer die Aussprache des Hebraischen bei den rabbanitischen juden bezeugt hat. Bei diesen rabbanitischen Juden ist diese Aussprache aber abegloest worden durch eine solche, die von den Masoreten ausgebildet worden ist, die ihren Sitz in Tiberias gehabt haben.

Baillet recognized that Vilsker described correctly the phonetics of the Samaritan language. However Baillet asks, “Have we truly the words where Quf is pronounced similarly, or is it not in
the case where the letter which resembles ayin, has been confounded with it? Baillet is concerned about the true vocalization of the ancient Arameen. Baillet questions the technical reasons from which Vilsker decided to note the pronunciation in the chart of vowels. Baillet notes that the translator from Russian to French adopted the same attitude for the same reasons. Baillet regrets that in the six volumes of Z. Ben Hayyim, this difficulty was not an obstacle. Baillet is not convinced that one word can have two accents on two consecutive syllables, if the first is a secondary accent.

In Baillet’s view one is able to say that all words with two syllables carry the accent on the penultimate except if the last syllable is long or very long, which in that case is accented. Baillet feels it is important to thus return on the length of syllables and on the rhythm of the language according to which it is pronounced. With that said the long syllables dominate largely. On these bases Baillet feels that Vilkser and his translator have badly rendered certain pronunciations. They have in effect shadowed (d’innombrables) the long vowels and not noted this in the transcription. Baillet feels that the most severe result is that this negligence is running in the models (paradigms). The same thing is seen in the names of numbers, in pronouns, in names with suffixes, in prepositions, etc. Baillet feels a more serious error still is in the treatment of the term “virgin” pronounced in ancient Arameen as betulti, betultak and not betulti, betulatak (p.53) which corresponds to “mes vierges, tes bierges….” Baillet regrets that certain translation choices of Margain rendered his French edition inferior to the original Russian edition. In the end with all the technicalities aside Baillet admits one must thank Vilkser and Margain as Oriental scholars have need of a grammar of ancient Samaritan and the contribution of Vilsker is a serious progress towards that end.

Baillet concludes by writing:

*Sans doute, les orientalists avaient besoin d’une grammaire de l’arameen samaritain, et celle-ci représente un sérieux progres par rapport à ses devanciers. Vilsker et Margain ont surement fait tout leur possible, et il faut les remercier. L’instrument de travail qu’ils nous livrent n’est cependant pas tout a fait au point. N’aurait-il donc pas mieux valu, sur la base de bonnes editions des textes, etudier d’abord a fond la langue de chaque epoque? C’est par une synthese qu’on pourrait arriver a un resultat valable et definitif.*

Today there are about 700 Samaritans still living in Israel. One is named Benjamin Tzedakah whose family served in the Israeli army (IDF). Tzedakah corresponded with Vilsker for many years, as Tzedakah is a scholar of the Samaratin history and language. Second Temple scholars know the Samaritans from Josephus accounts of them.

Rabbinic scholars of the Talmud will recall in tractate Rosh Hashanah the “bad PR” regarding the Samaritans in perek sheni, who were said to have intentionally confused the Rabbinic leadership by making bonfires, to intentionally throw off the accurate reporting of sightings of the new moon as related to Rosh Hodesh. Rabban Gamliel examined witnesses testifying to the new moon whose testimonies risked being confused by the Samaritan sabotage. Before the Samaritan acts of sabotage to new moon sightings the Sanhedrin was more lenient from whom they accepted testimony about the moon’s appearance - full, half etc. Beacons used to be lit
but after the Samaritans caused harm, they enacted that messengers should go forth. Bonfires were lit by bringing long poles of cedar wood and rushes and pine wood and tow flax tied together. These were lit and waved on top of a hill to and fro so that 3 hills might discern them.[34] The beacons were kindled from Har Ha Zaytim to Sartaba, and from Sartaba to Agrippina and from Agrippina to Hauran and from Hauran to Beth Baltin, so the diaspora appeared as a signal testifying to the new moon.[35] In Jerusalem in a courtyard named Beth Yaazek witnesses assembled for the court to exam them.[36] The court thoroughly examined witness as to how they saw the moon.[37] Rabban Gamliel provided diagrams of the moon in its phases.[38] Rabbi Yehoshua is said to have submitted to Rabban Gamliel’s Rosh Hodesh calculations that fell out on Yom Kippur, as opposed to Rabbi Yehoshua’s differing calculations, thereby submitting to the authority of the Sanhedrin.[39]

However, Vilsker’s works depart from such polemics and scientifically analyzes the language of this sect. Vilsker’s work was reviewed in French by Jean-Pierre Rothschild “On Leib H. Vilsker: Manuel d’arameen samaritain trans. From Russian in Revue des Etudes Juives 141, ½ (1982), p. 237-239. Rothschild writes:

Le present manuel vise, acce success, non al l’exhaustivite, mais a la comodite. On nous fournit (p. 11-20) une introduction rapide a l’histoire samaritaine, a la place de l’arameen samaritain dans sa famille linguistique, a l’histoire de la langue, aux sources samaritaines et a l’histoire de la samaritologie. La partie proprement grammaticale est amasee entre les pages 21 et 89 (les neuf pages consacrees a la syntaxe, conre cinque pour les seuls numeraux, sont tout de meme un peu maigres). Le chapitre du lexique (p.91-96) explique plusieurs idiotismes frequents et le calendrier samaritain; l’appendice 1 (p.97-104) reproduit plusieurs textes tres courts, en respectant le graphisme des scribes, et en donne la transliteration, la transcription phonetique, la traduction et le commentaire; l’appendice 2 presente, d’apres les ketubot de la collection Firkovic, a Leningrad, des especimes d’ecritures echelones entre les XVI et XVIII siecles, avec leurs dates et les noms des copistes. Aux pp. 109-118, une bibliographie de 153 titres cite les etudes classiques des cent dernieres annees et beaucoup de travaux recents. Bref apercu des manuscrits samaritains, dans les bibliothèques sovietiques pp. 117-118; carte de l’ancienne diaspora samaritaine p.119.

Vilsker as an autodidact Hebrew philologist focused primarily on the linguistic aspects of the Samaritan language. His scholarly interests included the whole gamut of Jewish studies. He wrote articles on a wide range of topics. The following are the tip of the iceberg of a few of his essays characterized by thoroughness and depth:

1. At the root of Pushkiniana among the Jews
2. Works of Sholem Aleichem translated into Hebrew
3. A review of a bibliography of Mendel Moicher Seform
4. The Medzibuz tombstone (the kever of the Baal Shem Tov)
5. Unknown letters of Chayim Nachman Bialik
6. etc
The Saltykov’s libraries publication, Oriental Collection, included Vilsker’s sole published work that appeared during the years of perestroika, after his passing. This work is called, The Book of Wisdom by Saeed bin Babshada. It became the basis for numerous studies and publications.

Babshad was a philosopher and poet who lived in Babylon. Frikovich obtained this book from a grave in the Jewish cemetery in Egypt. Small fragments of the book were found by different archaeologists in different times and are now located in different libraries of the world. The Israeli scientist E Shearman who visited the Leningrad library in 1960 mentioned the manuscript. Vilsker gave the name to the manuscript The Book of Wisdom. Vilskers knowledge of the literature of the Middle Ages and totality of foreign languages allowed Vilsker to establish a genuine name of the author and the time of his life that belonged to the second half of the 10th century and first have of the 11th century during the bridge between the Geonim and Rishonim.

Vilsker detected a falsification. The poet and philosopher was not a Karaite as was previously assumed. Vilsker did not challenge the editing that someone has “corrected” the original manuscript itself. However solving the puzzle involved Vilsker to connect the dots. Vilsker read in a Karaite prayer book a liturgical poem that was an acrostic. This acrostic spelled out the author’s name of the work Book of Wisdom. David Ben Babshad ha-Kohen was the name in the decoded encryption. Vilsker argued that “Saed” and “david “are one and the same person. It is well known that adding the Arabic name by non-Arabs in Arabic speaking countries was widespread in those times. By combining disparate excerpts from the books of Saed Ben Babshad and thus restoring the text, the scientist returned a great poetic work of the medieval author to the worlds’ consciousness. A.F. Margolin made a poetic translation into Russian of the Book of Wisdom by Saeed ben Babshad. Dr. Fleischer argued that the author was a Persian Jew and wrote a whole book about Saeed Ben Babshad. Vladimir Lazaris made another translation of 37 couplets from this book chapter “Hymn to Wisdom” which was published in Ariel journal number 15, 1993.

The following is a fragment prose translation by Vilsker:

The moon and the sun are shining- these are the greatest of the stars
But in the light of Wisdom, all stars are pale

The tiaras are numerous, the decorations are luxurious
But Before the crown of Wisdom, all tiaras deteriorate

The pure gold is magnificent, the precious stones are splendid

[«Светит Луна, и Солнце – величайшее из светил,/ Но перед светом Мудрости бледнеют все светила./ Многочисленны короны, обильны украшения,/ Но перед венцом Мудрости ветшают все короны./ Прекрасно чистое золото, великолепны драгоценные камни,/ Но перед прелестью Мудрости все они блекнут/».] [40]
In the preface to his book Proverbs of Saeed bin Babshad Dr. Ezra Fleischer wrote that the Vilskers labor towards rescuing these fragments are simply infinitely invaluable. “I was looking for ways to see Firkowicz manuscripts. Professor Shearman saw them, but did not study them, and I had been waiting for 15 years.” In Fleischer’s book that number over 300 pages, Fleischer constantly refers to the conclusions and findings of Lev Yefimovich as invaluable.

Vilsker’s immediate family included an assemblage of a number of scholars. Dr. Vilsker’s wife Dr. Gita Gluskina, the daughter of Rav Menachem Mendel Gluskin, was also a medievalist who published a dissertation on the unpublished manuscript of Rabbi Yehudah Al Harizi author of the Takamoni and a translation of Rambam’s Moreh Nevukhim, also found in the St. Petersburg Saltykov library collection. Dr. Vilsker’s sistern-in-law Dr. Leah Gluskina was a scholar of the period of the second Temple in Jerusalem. Leah’s husband was Dr. David Yosef Amusin who published 100s of articles and over 50 books in various languages on Jewish studies on Dead Sea Scrolls, Biblical exegesis, and history of ancient Israel. Leah’s sister who joined HaShomer Hatzayir was sent to Siberia as punishment under Stalin. Another sister Sonia was the mother of the famous Russian ballet dancer Sasha Minsk.

Dr. Vilsker’s father-in-law was the Rav Gluskin was born in 1878 in Parichi, where his father was rabbi of the town after Rabbi Hillel of Parichi. Both Rabbis Hillel and Aaron Gluskin received semichah from the Tzemach Tzedek (3rd Lubavitch Rebbe). Some sources on Rav Gluskin include: Eleh Ezkarah, Toldot Yisrael, Mayanot, Rabbi Seidman, Gedolei Minsk, and Dr. Gita Gluskina’s “Remembrances of My Childhood” as well as oral history interviews.

Rabbi Seidman writes: Rav Gluskin was a child prodigy who was constantly learning and intensely diligent. He possessed a personal charm that enchanted all who came into contact with him. While still young he acquired the reputation of an iluy – a prodigy whose soul was fashioned for greatness. Rav Gluskin would derive insights into the words of Chazal and clarify their opinions through cogent analysis. As he rose to greatness in Torah scholarship, he rose equally in his mastery of Chassidus. His humility resembled that of Moshe Rabbenu. Although he frequently came up with new interpretations he never claimed any originality for his cutting edge breakthroughs in Rabbinic thought. Anything he discerned, he attributed to the greatness of former Gedolim, on whose shoulders he stood to glimpse into the PaRDeS.

His inner light shone from the depths of an elevated soul and in conversation he shared hidden treasures of his vast knowledge and expertise in Halachah in a way that would ignite other people’s understanding. The range of his deep learning was multifaceted and wide. He shunned polemics, with the goal in order to do mitzvot, realizing that if the Jews were divided in machloket they were vulnerable to their enemies as Haman yemach shemo knew in Megillas Esther.

He penetrated into the depths of Jewish matters in a straightforward manner. He employed objectivity without prior biases or prejudices or preconceived notions or side interests, a requirement of his functioning as Av Bet Din in Minsk. His analysis was like a chisel of logic. His life was one of dedication and self-sacrifice for all Jews with his soul filled with Ahavas Hashem, Ahavas Torah, and Ahavas Yisrael. Although Rav Gluskin was a Chassid among Misnagdim, a
relationship of respect, care, and love was established for what was common to Chassidim and Misnagdim was respect for greatness in Torah. He did not engage in polemics with the opponents of Chassidim. Instead of saying “Let us go and prove, and argue” he would say, “Let us go and sing.” It is impossible not to be enchanted by the grace of his personality and the modesty of his middot tovet. When his brother-in-law Dr. Lieberman humorously nuded him with the statement “the Chassidic Shtiebelach are superfluous”, Rav Gluskin responded with a smile and laugh saying, “I think every city and shtetl should have Chassidic Shteibelach, so that Jews not become arrogant with the fancy and big architectural synagogues manifesting an `Edifice (Oedipus) complex.””

The oppression and persecution of Judaism under the Communists in Russia aroused in Rav Gluskin later in his life wondrous powers of resistance, courage, resolve, and steadfastness to allow for continuity of Jewish life. The Rav Gluskin brought light from the darkness. The Rav communicated with other Jews as if he were a ship in the night sending secret light signals to other boats, for during the Communist persecution, KJB agents frequently infiltrated the synagogues and one had to be careful in speech and deed for it was illegal at times to teach Torah, own a siddur, bake matzah, etc. Rav Gluskin was a master at communicating through hints.” Rabbi Zeidman continues describing the secretive manner of communicating under religious persecution: “ships that meet in the heat of the sea during a storm, they hint or signal to the other in the language of secrets. One doesn’t know what his neighbor is bearing and where he is destined to turn. So is the meeting of Jewish men of spirit under the oppression of the times of the regime of the Bolsheviks.

[1] Where not otherwise noted (for example (1) documents sent by Dr. Emanuel Gluskin) this section is based on a translation from Russian to English by Dr. Marina Korsakova Kreyn of Shulamit Shalit’s article appearing online about Dr. Vilsker at article (in Russian) about Vilsker: http://berkovich-zametki.com/2009/Zametki/Nomer4/Shalit1.php Papers in which Vilsker is mentioned:

[2] The technical knowledge proved useful and many years later he was able to change the lock all by himself in a cooperative apartment, and this made the whole of his family very proud.

[3] Tarn writes in response to Shulamith Shalit’s article on which my section on Vilsker is based on the “intelligence, civilization, and even sense of humor of the Vilsker family”: Alex Tarn Beit Aryeh, Israel - at 2013-01-04 12:19:32 EDT. Only now read this article four years ago and I cannot help but respond. Thanks to his friendship with the son of Lev Yefimovich Vilsker (ל"ה), and Gita Mendelevna Gluskin (א"ר), I had the privilege to know both when I still lived in St. Petersburg; I used to visit their apartment on Vasilevsky. And today, Boris and Katia will be visiting me - so that’s a coincidence.
All this wonderful family is an example of intelligence [civilized behavior] in the highest sense of the word. They are the scientists, scribes, moneyless that have saved, despite being swept through the Stalinist terror and the war, and the mud and filth of horrific Soviet life, some implausible emotional softness, kindness, and constant unconditional willingness to help, to respond practically to any human need somehow caught up in their sight. I also owe them a lot.

I want to tell a funny story that I heard from Boris. To put it mildly, they [Vilskers] were not rich. When Lev Efimovitch would go out to buy bread, dressed in his threadbare coat and with a red shopping bag in his hand, he was not distinguished from the good-for-nothings that were crowding at the entrance to the grocery store. Hence this important specialist in the field of Jewish medieval poetry would be regularly stopped with a traditional offer "to be the third" [to share a bottle of alcohol]. Once he laughingly told his son about it. – “Well, what do you answer them?” - Boris asked, knowing his father's unwillingness and inability to offend people with the word "no." – “I always tell them the same thing: "Not now ..." - replied Lev Yefimovich. "Not now." This was the essence of Lev Yefimovich. This expression became our proverb.

Yekaterinburg, Russia - at 2013-01-04 11:30:38 EDT

Once I was acquainted with Lev Yefimovich and Gita Mendelevna. They were, if I may say so, my "godparents" in medieval Hebrew poetry. And I always remember that and I will always be grateful to them. I am grateful to fate for having brought me to these wonderful people. Meeting and communicating with them was not just pleasant and helpful; this largely changed me and my attitude towards life and people. 4 January 2013.


Somehow I missed this great article before and came across it just now. This article is about a dear person with whom we used to be close and whose books, with his inscriptions, are on my bookshelf. Thank you for the article.

[6] Scholem writes, "To be sure the universities did not encourage Jewish studies in those days. Today, when there are hardly any Jews remaining in Germany all the German Universities are eager to establish chairs in Judaica. But in those days when Germany had a lively Jewish population in great ferment, not a single university or provincial ministry would hear of Jewish studies. What Heine wrote is quite true: If there were only one Jew in the world, everyone would come running to have a look at him, but now that there are too many people try to look away.) See: Scholem, Gershom, “How I came to the Kabbalah” in Commentary, May 1980: 69, 005, p. 40.

[7] Amusin published many hundreds of articles in Jewish studies and over 50 books translated in many languages of the world. Yet Rambi lists only the following 4 in English on the DSS:
1 Amusin, I. D.(Iosif Davidovich) 4Q Testimonia, 15-17. Hommages à André Dupont-Sommer (1971) 357-361 1971

Both Gita and Lea also received doctorates in Jewish studies. Gita published her dissertation on Rav Yehudah Alharizi’s work. Lea was a scholar of 2nd Temple Judaism - including the works of Philo, Josephus, Dead Sea Scrolls, and the formation of the Mishnah. Gita and Lea were 2 of 4 sisters. Esther joined Hashomer HaTzair and was punished by Soviet authorities by being sent to harsh conditions in Siberia. Sonia married a man named Minsk, whose son together was the famous ballet dancer Sasha Minsk. I met with Gita in Givatayim around Chanukah of 2004 and interviewed Dr. Gluskina primarily with regards to her father the Av Bet Din of Minsk Rav Menachem Mendel Gluskin (ztsl) the son in law of Rabbi Eliezer Rabinowitz who was the son in law of the Minsker Gadol, Rabbi Eliyahu Pearlman.

Shalit, Shulamit, “Aryeh Vilsker and his treasures 1919-1988: On the 90th Anniversary of his Birth”, accessed 5/12/16 at 12:00 pm. p.2; At URL.

Jonathan Rose writes, “The Soviets as David Fishman illustrates cultivated their own hostility to expressions of Jewish culture, and after the liberation of Nazi occupied territories the Soviets often continued their literary vandalism begun by the Nazis. Before, after and even during the war with Germany, Soviet authorities suppressed reports of Nazi atrocities against the Jews. Russian scholar Arlen Blum draws on the archives of Soviet censors to show that the crescendo of state-enforced anti-Semitism after the war was spearheaded by the suppression of Jewish authors, publishers, and even literary characters, as well as a complete ban on the publication of Yiddish books. There is good reason to believe that shortly before his death in 1953, Stalin was planning to deport the Jews of the USSR to the far reaches of Siberia. The destruction of books may have been once again a first step toward the destruction of Jews” [The Holocaust and the Book, p. 2].

Shalit, Shulamit, p.7

The retirement age in the Soviet Union was 55 for women and 60 for men.

Shulamit Shalit in reference to a criticism of her article with regards to the understanding of the nature of the “Samaritan language” retorts: Shulamit Shalit Israel - at 2009-02-18 06:12:39 EDT.

An answer to a nameless reader: The reader - at 2009-02-16 04:58:50 EDT article about Vilsker definitely informative and useful, although it is written in a sugary manner similar other publications of this author. it is not clear why the author and his Samaritan interlocutor do not know that the Samaritans use Aramaic language. Samaritan language does not exist.

If the Samaritans used Aramaic, Leo Vilsker would not call his book "Samaritan language." Dr. Boris Podolsky, an expert in Semitic languages (Tel Aviv University), explains: "The Samaritan Torah was written in the same Hebrew as the Jewish Torah. However, the Samaritans’ pronunciation is very different from our familiar pronunciation in the Hebrew language; this is why the scientists call this version of the Hebrew language the Samaritan language.
Besides, the Samaritans, as well as Jews, had translated the Torah into Aramaic (already 2000 years ago); therefore it is meaningless to speak of Aramaic as the language of Samaritans.”

One can read in the above-mentioned journal "A-B Hadashot ha-Shomron:" “The journal is published in 4 languages: ancient-Samaritan preserved from the time of the First Temple, Arabic, Hebrew, and English. The journal exists from 1935.”

More than half of the Samaritans that are living today in Holon, plus another 4 families (in Benjamin, Givat Ada, Ashdod and Matane), speak Hebrew. Before the first intifada, the Samaritans lived in Nablus, in the old town, but then they moved to Kiryat Luza on Mount Gerizim. This segment of Samaritans speaks Arabic. Take a note that in the presented tables offer Samaritan Alphabet and Written Letter. If desired, the reader could compare them with the Aramaic alphabet and the letter to see that the written letters are completely different.

I have received a call from Dr. David Joffe, a writer and reader of my site, who personally knew L. Vilsker. He thanked me for the publication and said that he found in it the precise description of Vilsker (as Dr. Joffe remembers him): an intelligent and knowledgeable scholar and a very warm person.

[15] As Lea Gluskin notes in her article, “The Life and Works of Joseph Amusin (1910-1984)” which appeared in Revue de Qumrân 14:1, p.109-120, Amusin had a hard life not only in academia in Russia where appointments in Hebrew Philology and Jewish related matters were far and few in between, but Amusin was born in turbulent times and his childhood coincided with WWI, the Revolution, and years of civil war. Yet Amusin’s father saw to his son’s Jewish education as a youngster. Lea writes, “Joseph Amusin often remembered his father advising him to learn Hebrew and the history of Jewish culture and saying that he would be able to learn all other things later, but not these precious areas of the soul of his people. The boy luckily encountered a very good teacher, a broad minded and educated man, who trained his pupil for serious studies, developed his intellect and became his first adult deeply esteemed friend” (p.109). Amusin became proficient in Hebrew to such a high level as a child that Amusin read mainly in Hebrew, even recreational reading such as Tolstoy’s “Cossacks” read in Hebrew translation. Amusin left his home Vitebsk (Belorussia) at the young age of 14 for ever, and came to the sophistical Leningrad. In 1935 Amusin entered Leningrad University (Historical Dept). His early paper “Pushkin and Tacitus” was published in 1941 in Pushkinsky Vremenik. After graduation he was forced to enlist in the army and attained rank of lieutenant (1941-1945). During the Siege of Leningrad Amusin’s beloved father who encouraged him to pursue knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish texts, died of starvation and Amusin as the eldest son felt it his duty to support his mother (zl). Thus after the war he had to combine his scientific studies with work in order to earn money to support his mother as a matter of Kibud Eim – honoring his mother. Amusin lectured in ancient history at the Leningrad Pedagogic Institute of Oriental Studies. His first dissertation was based on the Emperor Claudius famous letter to the Alexandrines and the Emperor’s policy towards Jews(P. Lond., 1912) as Amusin knew many languages including Latin and Greek. In 1949 Amusin received a post-doc degree. By that time he had published papers on the subject of Vesbnik dreney islorri, devoted to philological analysis of texts, carefully examining each word and expression, to determine historical facts. After receiving his degree Amusin encountered great discrimination on top of his hard life.
Amusin could not find a job so he left Leningrad for Ulianovsk, the native city of Lenin, where he taught ancient history from 1950 to 1954 at the Pedagogical Institute publishing papers on Biblical exegesis. Two papers aroused special interest including “The designation of slaves in Hellenistic Egypt according to the Septuagint” (1952) and “the people of the earth (amei ha-aretz) (1955). The first essay was translated into Japanese in 1958 and the second into Italian in 1986 posthumously. In 1954 Amusin returned to Leningrad in the position of assistant of academician AI Tiumenev. From 1960 until the end of Amusin’s life he was an associate of the Leningrad Department of the Institute of Oriental Studies Academy of Sciences in the USSR, from where in 1966 he received a doctorate. Amusin published during this time 150 papers including four books: (1) The Dead Sea Ms. (1960, 61) (2) The Discoveries in the Dead Sea Region (1964, 1965); (3) The Qumran Texts vol. 1 Translation Introduction and Commentary (1971), (4) The Qumran Community (1983). His books were translated into Japanese, Greek, Roumanian, Hungarian, Polish, Slovak, and Georgian. Amusin published numerous of his 150 articles himself in English, German, and French (Qumran Probleme, 1962; Revue de Qumran 1963, 71, 74; Israel Exploration Journal 1964; Hommages AndreDupon-Sommer,1971; Klio 1981, etc. His books and 65% of his papers dealt with DSS. Ammusin agreed that the DSS Qumran sect were most likely the Essenes described in Josephus and other ancient 2nd temple texts. Amusin published on the leader of the sect known as the “teacher of righteousness”. He argued the Teacher of Righteousness was persecuted and put to death by the “impious Priest.” Amusin published on all aspects of DSS including The Commentary of Habakkuk, Damascus Document, Commentaries on Psalms and on Micah as well as Nahum and the Isaiah scroll. Amusin illuminated how the historical events alluded to in the scrolls correlated with ancient historiographical accounts and how the sect, although not Christian, shared some (not all) elements theologically with later Christian developments. Amusin showed how the sects historical allusions are coded in encryptions out of fear of governmental censorship. Amusin argued that Demetrius is Demetrius III Eucairos (95-83 BCE) who had been called upon by the rabbis in 88 BCE to aid them in their rebellion against Jannaeus (103-76 BCE) until his wife Alexandra Salome (76-67) who reinstated the Pharisees to power. Salome was the sister of the Av Bet Din of the Sanhedrin Shimon ben Shetah. Amusin proved that the struggle between their 2 sons Aristobulos and Hyrcanus, the first supported by the Sadducees, the second by the Pharisees resulted in the intrusion under Roman Pompeius in 63 BCE. The designation of Alexander Janneus as “the lion of wrath” and the “wicked self proclaimed priest” indicate hostility and Amusin argued Alexander Janneus was the chief antagonist against the “teacher of righteousness.” Amusin revealed the social conscience of the DSS sect as the poor, ascetic, and simple in phrases such as “the congregation of the poor”, “the simple ones of Judah”, “the doers of the law”, “the elect of G-d”, and even “the new covenant” of this sect that help property in common a form of communism avant la letter but unlike Marxism that called religion “the opiate of the masses” for the sake of the spiritual religious life as a form of Religious messianic Utopianism. The Pharisaic Talmudic tradition regarding poverty and wealth as predestined for every individual and existing even after the coming of the messiah differed with the DSS sect who like Christians saw poverty as a virtue. Amusin also dealt with dating of the DSS such as the Manual (1QS) and the Hymns (1QH) being composed earlier than the Commentaries but the Damascus Document (CD)- later. Amusin also traced anti-Talmudic polemic against Qumran theology such as dualism. While DBL has shown that this polemic of
the rabbis is against Zorastrianism, Amusin noted that the Qumran sects designation of “the sons of light” vs. “the sons of darkness” probably was an attack on the Romans. The separate calendar of the DSS sect, their disdain for the corruption in the Jerusalem temple allied with the Roman government, and their otherworldly emphasis on 2 worlds, this and the next, suggested great differences with the Pharisees not to mention the Sadducees. This in part is the subject of DBL’s paper delivered at the Cleveland AJL Conference. However DBL does not focus on the DSS sect’s attack on the Jerusalem priesthood during the Roman times whereby the Qumran sect railed against “the priests who have done violence to my torah” evoking out of context Ezekiel 22, 26 and Zephaniah 3,4). In short Amusin’s work in part sought to understand the political historical background of corruption from which the DSS sect retreated to the Judean Desert near Ein Gedi. From revealing the historical background of the ‘prayer of Nabonidus” who engaged in moon worship, to the historical context of the Nabatean King Aretas called in for help by Hyrcanus, to the Pseudo Cyprian epistle, and the DSS sect as a precursor of Christianity, there was not any aspect of DSS that escaped Amusin’s notice or philological and Historical textual analysis. At the end of Amusin’s life he followed his social consciousness devoting himself to writing papers on the living conditions of the vulnerable mentioned in the bible such as the poor, widows, and orphans in Ancient Palestine, as well as the legal position of Gerim and toshavim, revealing the policies of the authorities of reigning governments with regards to social help towards the native population. Thus Mark Cohen in his 2 volume set on the _Voice of the Poor_ in the Cairo Geniza that gathers texts that shed light on the Kahal’s attention to protecting the vulnerable in medieval society, although a different epoch, also is scholarship motivated by a social conscience, as the Talmud Tractate Maseket Berachot states with regards to when the shema is to be recited at night, “when the poor man returns home (after a hard day of work) to eat his meager dinner of “bread with salt.” Amusin dreamed of writing a book towards the end of his career on the Bar Kochba revolt but the circumstances of his life were not easy and quite hard due to persecution, discrimination, and poverty so that many of his scholarly plans and intentions never came to light due to the limits of income, time, and general persecution in Russia particularly for scholars interested in subjects relating to Jewish studies.

[16] "This is how my people have perished" – these words will be said another massacre, eight centuries late, by Chaim Nachman Bialik

[17] Notez Bien: play of words in Hebrew: "... ezkor Dodi dadey Yonati" ... which of course is an allusion to Shir HaShirim: See: 1:13-17


[19] שוּבִי שוּבִי הַשוּלַמִית, שֵׁבֶי שוּבִי וְנֶחֱזֶה - בָׁךְ; מַה - תֶחֱזוּ, בַּשוּלַמִית, כִּמְחֹּלַת, הַמַחֲנָׁיִם, שוּבִי שוּבִי

[20] Rashi teaches the metaphor fo the woman’s breast as a reference to the Beit HaMikdash on the pusek: אִם - חוֹמָׁה הִיא, נִבְּנֶה עָלֶיהָ טִירַת כָׁסֶף; וְאִם - דֶּלֶת הִיא, נָּצוּר עָלֶיהָ לוּחַ אָרֶז. 9 If she be a wall, we will build upon her a turret of silver; and if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar. The breast metaphor also figures as an allusion to the wildlife, flora and fauna of Eretz Yisrael with the “rose (shoshanim) as a symbol of “redemption” (all of Israel is a 3 petalled rose- that informs halachah to hold the Kiddush cup in the palm of the hand as a rose”
when we read

שְנֵּי שָׁדַיִךְ כִשְנֵּי עֳפָׁרִים.

5 Thy two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies.

תְאוֹמֵּי צְבִיָׁה, הָרוֹעִים, בַשוֹשַנִים.

10 I am a wall, and my breasts like the towers thereof; then was I in his eyes as one that found peace.

Rashi teaches that the walls refer to the walls of the Beit HaMikdash in Jerusalem and the doors to the doors of the synagogues in Jerusalem.

[21] Perhaps an allusion to the “doe eyes of Leah” who according to rabbinic texts wept when she learned that she was supposed to marry Esav, and then due to the merit of Rochel, Rochel deprived herself to wait another 7 years by letting her sister marry Yakov first.

[22] The earliest Hebrew handmade book pre 1200 from the Sefardic areas is MS Leningrad, Saltykov-Shedrin Public Library, II Firkovitch B 124 Fols. 64-94, a biblical manuscript copied in 946 in Kairouan (Tunisia); MS Leningrad, II Firkovitch Heb.-Ar. I2440 fols 1-9 was written in Valencia in 1119; The third oldest Hebrew book in libraries I at Oxford i.e. Bod Heb.b1, fols 10-20 (Cowley’s Catalogue no 2673), a tractate of the BT. Copied in 1123 by a scribe originating in Libya; MS. Leningrad Heb-Ar I4587 fols 1-14is the 4th oldes, copied in Mahdia (Tunisia) in 1125/6; The 5th oldest Hebrew handmade book is in Hamburg: constituting 3 localized manuscripts from Spain dating from the 12th century, the earliest being MS. Hamburg, Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek Cod. Hebr. 19 (Steinschneider’s Catalogue no. 165), a Talmudic copy produced in Gerona in 1184. From Ashkenazic areas only 4 books have survived all of them late 12th century and unlocalized. The earliest is dated 1177 (MS Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale II-I-7 of Talmudic treatises). From Italy 2 manuscripts (written by 8 copyists) have survived from the late 11th century, the oldest dated 1072/73 (MS Vatican Ebr. 31) and 2 from the 1st half of the 12th century. Thus Leningrad is home to the 2 oldest handmade Hebrew books due to Firkovitch collecting. It is well known that regarding Biblical texts the Leningrad Codex, Allepo Codex, and Vatican recension are the oldest Biblical texts known to date besides the revolutionary findings of the DSS. The DSS date to late 2nd temple and thus predate these medieval manuscripts by almost 1000 years. In short the most rich Leningrad collections whose dated manuscripts have been known until recently only from partial catalogues and handlists, references in literature and some microfilms (partly studies by the French team of the SAFR Database Paleoagreaphical Project) may reveal more dated books possibly. It is clear that Vilsker had knowledge of these unknown texts, but circumstance of historical persecution and limits in publishing his findings prevented in some cases “getting the word out” to make these treasures known to the rest of the scholarly community. That is why Vilsker’s discovery for instance of 22 unknown poems of Rav Yehudah HaLevy in Vilsker’s library is so revolutionary and represents probably even more undiscovered treasures awaiting to be proclaimed and announced etc.

[23] Much can be said about the Firkovitch collection. One aspect is its copious Karaite materials. For example the earliest extant example of a tradition of donating privately owned Sifrei Torah and biblical codices to synagogue foundations is documented there. The Karaite custom of donating biblical ms to synagogue foundations is attested by many inscription in biblical codices in the Firkovitch collection of the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg etc A scribe notes that the Sifrei Torah he was commissioned to transcribe was intended for synagogue use produced for a certain person and his sister so that it be dedicated to a community in a so-far unidentified town in southern Crimea. (MS St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia EBP 1 A 35; see A Harkavy and HL Strack, Katalog der hebraischen Bibelhandschriften der Kaiserlichen öffentlichen Bibliothek in St. Petersburg (Leipzig, 1875), p. 220. The Sefer Torah was written in Kokoz . The same scribe was active in Crimea later when he inscribed a dedication in a torah scroll donated to the synagogue of the Karaite community in Solkhat (Staryi Krym).
[24] Given Shulamith Shalit's highly cultured background we wonder if the reference to “windmills” is not that of Cervantes in Don Quixote?

[25] Last words are often significant. Consider for example Yakov’s blessing to his sons at the end of Bereishit, or Moshe Rabbenu’s blessing of the tribes in Zot HaBracha. In rabbinic texts likewise rabbinic students know that the last words of Rav Yochanan ben Zakai carried immense wisdom even from beyond the veil etc. In secular texts the last words of Socrates have drawn much ink, including Nietzsche’s note that “I owe a cock to Aeschlepius” in fact is an allusion to the deity of healing Aechlepias who with Apollo is allied with medicine and refuot etc. Likewise the reported last words of the poet Goethe were “mehr licht, mehr licht” ambiguously signifying equivocally the uncertainty if the poet was going to a realm where “there was more light that he sensed” or was the poet just terrified calling for more light, more light? Whatever in limudei Kodesh, the light of the first day according to Rashi is the light stored up for the righteous in olam habah, to which Rambam in Hilchot teshuva elaborates:

[26] The article in the EJ by Lidia Domenica Matassa, John Macdonald, Benyamim Tsedaka, Ayala Loewenstamm, Haim Z’ew Hirschberg and Shlomo Hofman, which cites the work of Benjamin Tzedakah, a Samaritan academic scholar living in Israel who corr...
through the land of Israel. Even so, the origins and early history of the Samaritans are quite problematic because the sources are far removed from the events and because the non-Samaritan sources tend to be hostile.

One tradition is that the Samaritans originated with the northern tribes of Israel because only a small proportion of these tribes was deported during the Assyrian conquests of the late eighth century B.C.E. and that those who remained on the land formed what later became the Samaritans (Mor 1989, 1). Another Samaritan tradition claims Samaritan origins lie in the pre-exilic period, at the very beginnings of Israelite history, and that the split between Samaritanism and Judaism only arose when the heretical priest Eli stole the Ark of the Covenant and established a rival cult. Until that time, the Ark of the Covenant had been kept at the sanctuary of YHWH on Mt. Gerizim.

According to this tradition, the priest Eli was prevented from rising to the high priesthood because he was of the family of Itamar, not the high priestly family of Eleazar. Nevertheless, he took the Ark of the Covenant from Mt. Gerizim to Shiloh and established a rival cult there. As a result of this, two centers of the priesthood arose. One center was on Mt. Gerizim, at whose head stood the legitimate high priest, Uzzi (a descendant of Phineas and of the family Eleazar). The second (heretical) priesthood was at Shiloh, and the priest Eli, a descendant of Itamar, was at its head. Thus, according to Samaritan tradition, Samaritanism is a perpetuation of the true Israelite faith, and Judaism only the continuation of Eli's heresy. This is the case, the Samaritan tradition claims, all the way through Samuel, Saul, David, and the Judean monarchy, with the rival cult of Eli eventually shifting from Shiloh to Jerusalem and continuing up to this day. A non-Samaritan tradition from the same period claims that the Samaritans originated in the Assyrian post-conquest settlement of populations from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim in northern Israel (II Kings 17:24–41), and that they were forced to worship the god of Israel by the native peoples. These immigrant groups brought with them the idols of their native cities, whom they continued to worship in conjunction with the deity of their new home. (II Kings 17:24–41; Ezra 4:2, 10; Mor 1989, 1): "Even while these people were worshiping the Lord, they were serving their idols. To this day their children and grandchildren continue to do as their fathers did" (II Kings 17:41). Another non-Samaritan tradition is that the Assyrian conquest of Israel was far from total, that significant numbers of Israelites remained on the land, and that the Assyrians settled a separate group of exiles in what used to be the Israelite northern kingdom. These populations eventually intermingled, in time becoming a discrete group of people who later came to be referred to as Cutheans and Samaritans (Jos., Ant. 9:288–391; Mor 1989, 1). But, unfortunately, even Samaritan historical traditions are not in agreement on either the time or the circumstances of their return. The Samaritan text Chronicle Adler relates the story of two returns, one under the high priest Seraiah in the early seventh century B.C.E. and another under the high priest Abdiel in the late sixth century B.C.E.!” The EJ then describes reference to the Samaritans in the time of Nehemiah by writing: "The first direct references we have to the Samaritans come from the book of Nehemiah. In 445 B.C.E., when the person we know as the biblical Nehemiah was appointed by the Persian king Artaxerxes I (464–424 B.C.E.) to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem and later (during a second "tour of duty") to be the governor of the province of Yehud. During some internecine rivalry surrounding the building of a wall around Jerusalem, Nehemiah named his enemies as Tobiah (the "Ammonite servant"), Geshem (the "Arab"), and Sanballat (the "Horonite"). Tobiah was a member of an established Jewish family (see *Tobiads ) from Transjordan (Neh. 2:10; 2:19; 4:7; 6:1). Geshem led the Arab tribes in the southern part of Judea. Sanballat the Horonite was a Samaritan who was coincidentally the Persian-appointed governor of Samaria, and therefore a direct rival of Nehemiah and a person with whom Nehemiah refused to have any contact (Mor 1989, 2–3). Sanballat, as the Persian-appointed governor of Samaria, may indeed have been in direct competition with Nehemiah, since Jerusalem was to be refortified, whilst Samaria, a provincial center, was not. Urban wall systems of the mid-fifth century are found only at Lachish and Tel en-Nasbeh and at Jerusalem during the time of Nehemiah (Hoglund 1992, 211). Another reason for Nehemiah’s rejection of the Samaritan contingent may have been that Judah had previously been part of the province of Samaria and that the Persian province of Yehud only came into being with the arrival of Nehemiah. This might explain why Sanballat wanted to be involved in the
building project. If Samaria had controlled Judah up to this point (and there is a hint of this in the earlier attempts to stop the building program of Ezra), then the hostility towards Nehemiah may have been real. In the same vein, Nehemiah may have felt threatened by Sanballat, feeling that he might be trying to promote integration of Yehud back into the province of Samaria. In either case, there is no proof; only supposition and guesswork.

Nehemiah’s program of wall-building can also be seen as an indicator of a reversal in the Persian attitude towards Jerusalem by reference to an earlier and failed attempt to rebuild the fortifications (Ezra 4:7–23). During that earlier attempt, officials in Samaria reported it to the Persian court, and Artaxerxes I ordered that the work be stopped. Samarian officials used imperial military forces to make sure his order was enforced. This lends some support to the idea expressed above that Judea might once have been part of the province of Samaria, hence the rivalry between Sanballat and Nehemiah, both Persian officials. One of Sanballat’s daughters married a son of the Jerusalem high priest Joiadah (Neh. 13:28; Jos, Ant. 11:306–12). Since Nehemiah believed in the “purity” ideology of the returnees, his reaction was to expel the couple from Jerusalem (Mor 1989, 4; Smith-Christopher 1994, 259).

[27] Alexander Marx as reported by Solomon Goldman encouraged ambitious dissertation seekers to tackle the Damascus Arabic translation of the Samritan Pentateuch acquired and housed in the JTSA collection.

[28] ויהי מלך אשור מבבל ומכותה וממעוא וסופרווים ויהושב בערים שלום, תחת בני ישראל, והירש את-שים, וישב عليهم


[32] The EJ writes, “according to Josephus, they once more come into view in Judea, where Manasseh, the brother of the high priest Jaddus, married Nikaso, a daughter of Sanballat III (a descendant of the Sanballat of the time of Nehemiah) (Jos., Ant 11:302–3; Mor 1989, 4). Josephus reports that this Sanballat, like his ancestor a governor of Samaria, hoped that through the marriage of his daughter to the high priest’s brother he could establish ties with the Jewish community in Jerusalem. However, Manasseh was offered two choices by the Jerusalem hierarchy: to stay in Jerusalem and divorce his wife, or to leave the city and take his Samaritan wife with him. Manasseh chose the second option, whereupon his father-in-law promised to build a temple on Mt. Gerizim where Manasseh would be high priest and that, in addition, he would take over civic leadership of Samaria on the death of his father-in-law. According to Josephus, many priests left Jerusalem and followed Manasseh to Samaria (Ant. 11:306–12; Mor 1989, 5). Sanballat III sent 8,000 soldiers to support Alexander’s campaigns and also convinced him that it would be to his advantage to allow the Samaritans to build a temple on Mt. Gerizim, where his son-in-law would be high priest. During this period when the Macedonians were consolidating their hold on the region and the Persians were not yet fully vanquished, the Samaritans quickly built their temple (it took less than nine months). The founding of a temple was not unusual; however, this temple was not far from its Jerusalem rival, and from the
establishment of this temple the Samaritans and the Jews grew further apart, and it is from this period onwards that much of the anti-Samaritan polemic in the Hebrew Bible and extra-biblical texts (such as Josephus) originates.

The temple was completed around 332 B.C.E., at the time that Alexander finally took control of Gaza (Mor 1989, 7), and was also contemporary with the establishment of a Macedonian colony in the city of Samaria and the rebuilding and resettling of Shechem (Purvis 1968, 105). However, Sanballat III died just two months into Alexander’s siege of Gaza (Jos., Ant. 11:325) and, according to the historian Quintus Curtius, after the siege of Gaza Alexander left a Greek official named Andromachus in charge of the region. Despite Sanballat III’s promise to his son-in-law, and for the first time since the Persian conquest, a Samaritan was not in charge of Samaria (Mor 1989, 9). The Samaritan leadership reacted strongly to this, rebelled against the Macedonians, captured and burned Andromachus alive, and then fled from Shechem to a cave in the Wadi Daliyeh just north of Jericho (Cross 1985, 7–17). The Macedonians retaliated immediately, with Alexander himself said to have left Jerusalem to punish the Samaritans. All of the rebels were killed, all Samaritans were banished from Samaria, and the city of Samaria was settled with Macedonian veterans (Mor 1989, 10). According to Josephus (Jos., Apion, 2:43), following the post-rebellion massacre, administrative control of the district of Samaria was given to the Jews because of their loyalty to Alexander. The Samaritans who survived the Macedonian massacre, and who had heretofore exercised control and political authority and cultural leadership in Samaria, were now wholly disenfranchised and they could not turn to Jerusalem for help. From the death of Alexander the Great, nothing much is known about the Samaritans until the rise of the Seleucid empire in around 200 B.C.E. From Josephus (Ant. 12:5–10) we know that a number of Samaritans and Jews settled in Egypt and that relations between them were very strained, with each side demanding that sacrifices be directed to their respective sanctuaries. Any grace or favor to one side was seen as detrimental to the other, and so a tit-for-tat hostility developed. In Palestine, the first report of open hostility between Shechemites and Jews in Jerusalem is dated to the time of Ptolemy V (Epiphanes) and Antiochus III in around 200 B.C.E. (Jos., Ant. 12:154–56). According to Josephus, the Jews were being harassed by Samaritans through raids on Jewish land and the capture and sale of Jews into slavery, and the Samaritans found themselves under pressure from Antiochus III, because they had allied themselves with pro-Ptolemaic policy, thinking that they would prevail against the Syrians. This was nothing new. This loyalty dated back to the Persian period when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite had allied against Nehemiah, the governor of the province of Judaea.” In 168 B.C.E. the two groups grew still further apart when the Seleucid king (Antiochus IV Epiphanes) ordered the Jews and the Samaritans to rededicate their temples to Zeus. In Judea, *Judah Maccabee organized a rebellion which culminated in the ousting of Zeus from the temple and its subsequent repurification. During this period, both Samaritans and Jews were subject to the persecutions of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.E.), as is seen in II Maccabees (5:23; 6:2), even though Samaria did not rebel against Antiochus IV. What had been a religious division now became a political conflict as well. Judea, having fought for its freedom from Seleucid rule, became an independent state, ruled by a line of high priests derived from the Hasmonean dynasty. One of them was John *Hyrkanus (134–104 B.C.E.), whose political program included the expansion of the state along with a campaign of propaganda to advertise itself and, as part of this campaign, Hyrkanus utilized a policy of forced conversion to Judaism. While Antiochus VII (Sidetes) was in the east, John Hyrkanus invaded northern Palestine and Syria. Among the places he captured were Shechem and Mt. Gerizim. Later in his reign, Hyrkanus laid siege to Samaria and after a year’s campaign took it (Jos., Wars 1:64ff; Ant. 13:275ff.). The bustling, cosmopolitan, and mainly non-Israelite city of Samaria was utterly destroyed by Hyrkanus (Isser 1999, 571), and in around 128 B.C.E., the sanctuary and temple on Mt. Gerizim were destroyed (Jos., Wars 1:62ff.; Ant. 13:254ff.). While the Jewish priesthood ceased to function after 70 C.E., the Samaritans continued to have an active priesthood with a high priest even after the temple on Mt. Gerizim was destroyed (Pummer 1998, 26–27), and whereas the inevitable dispersal of the Samaritans had not yet happened, the process was underway, not least because the Samaritans were now under the economic and political control of Jerusalem. However, a core group of Samaritans stayed near
Mt. Gerizim in the town of Sychar (which may have replaced Shechem as the center of Samaritan religious authority). There are very few sources other than Josephus to help outline the history of the Samaritans in the early Roman period, and those that do exist are often very hostile to their subject. Josephus, for instance, did not even consider the Samaritans to be Jews (Ant. 11:341). Pompey’s conquest of Palestine in 63 B.C.E. ended Jewish domination of Samaria (Jos., Wars 1:166). The cities that had been captured by the Hasmoneans were restored to their previous inhabitants. Samaria and other regions were joined to the Roman province of Syria and protected by two full Roman legions. Because so many of the people of Samaria had been killed or were too scattered to bring back together, the Romans repopulated the newly built town of Samaria with new colonists (Jos., Wars 1:169f.; Ant. 14:90f.; Isser 1999, 572). The proconsul of Syria, Aulus Gabinius (57–54 B.C.E.) had to quell an uprising by another Hasmonean, Alexander, son of Aristobulus, during which Roman soldiers sought refuge and came under siege on Mt. Gerizim. (Jos., Wars 1:175ff.; Ant. 14:100). In 43 B.C.E., with Roman backing, *Herod the Great restored order in Samaria (Jos., Wars 1:229; Ant. 14:284; Isser 1999, 572). At the end of the Roman civil war, Herod declared his loyalty to Octavian, who confirmed him as the Jewish king and conferred on him new territories (Jos., Wars 1:396ff.; Ant. 14:217); among these new territories was Samaria. Herod rebuilt and extended the city of Samaria and added a further 6,000 colonists to its population. He renamed the city Sebaste in honor of Octavian (Jos., Wars 1:403; Ant. 14:295ff.; Isser 1999, 573). There are numerous reports of acts of hostility against the Jews by Samaritans. How true these are is unknown, but there does seem to be a prevailing tradition of antagonism between the groups. As an example of the sort of thing reported, Josephus records that during the procuratorship of Coponius (6–9 C.E.) it had been the practice to keep the gates of the Jerusalem temple open after midnight at Passover. On one such occasion, a number of Samaritans are said to have secretly entered and scattered human bones throughout the grounds, rendering them unclean (Ant. 18:29f.). There is another account in Josephus (Ant. 18:85–89) about a massacre of Samaritans during the Procuratorship of Pilate (26–36 C.E.). Josephus reports that a man whom he describes as a rabble-rouser promised to show the Samaritans the sacred vessels of the mishkan (the ancient tabernacle) which, according to Samaritan tradition, Moses had buried in a secret place on Mt. Gerizim. This discovery would signal the Age of Divine Favor (the fulfillment of Samaritan eschatological belief involving Moses, the mishkan and a person (the "rabble-rouser") who was a sort of messianic figure—the "restorer"). A large group gathered in a nearby village with the intention of climbing Mt. Gerizim, but Pilate interpreted this as the prelude to revolt and so the gathered Samaritans were intercepted by Roman troops and killed or captured. The leaders were executed at Pilate’s orders. This was too much for the Samaritan council, who complained to Vitellius, the governor of Syria, who accepted their accusations against Pilate and sent Marcellus to take over in Judea and ordered Pilate to return to Rome for trial before the emperor Tiberius. This Pilate did, but Tiberius had died, and we know nothing further about this episode (Grabbe 1994, 424; Isser 1999, 576). An even more serious event occurred during the Procuratorship of Cumanus (48–52 C.E.) at a village named Gema (between Samaria and the Plain of Esdraelon to the north). Josephus reports that some Samaritans attacked a group of Galileans who were on their way to Jerusalem for a festival and killed either many or one (War 2:12:3, 232; Ant. 20, 6:1, 118; Tacitus, Annals XII, 54). When the Jews appealed to Cumanus he did nothing (allegedly because he had been bribed by the Samaritans). A mob of Jews took matters into their own hands and attacked some Samaritan villages. Cumanus then intervened, and both Jews and Samaritans appealed to the Syrian governor, Quadratus. After a preliminary investigation, Quadratus sent Cumanus, the military tribune Celer, some of the Samaritan notables, the high priests Jonathan and Ananias, and other Jewish leaders to Rome for trial before Claudius. Agrippa II petitioned Claudius on behalf of the Jews and Claudius found in their favor, executing the Samaritan delegation and exiling Cumanus. The tribune Celer was taken back to Jerusalem and executed publicly there (Isser 1999, 574–75).
משנה מסכת רашו השנה פרכ' ב
משנה א
אם מקריין אוות משלוחין אחר עמיו, באשנינו במקבלין, עדות ההדהר מכל אלה המשקלקלות两位 הת킨ן שלום:)
"זה מקבילה אלא ממכירה
משנה ב.
בראשון הוא מש蔫ון משאות המשקלקלות הת킨ן שייה שלחהו英特尔ו [4.

[33] מדעך את ביאו, מי אדם שאה אצלו vá אליו".
[34]ocrates שלב במדוד א INTERNAL ERROR 10.32.66.32:34851. לא ניתן למצוא את המילים besch הגדול במשנה את ביאו, אך הוא난ו את אולו, שאה אצלו. באך, אם מקברין כל אלה המשקלקלות两位 הת킨ן שלום:)
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משנה ב.
בראשון הוא מש瀏覽器 משאות המשקלקלות הת킨ן שייה שלחהו英特尔ו [4.

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משנה ב.
בראשון הוא משمارس משאות המשקלקלות הת킨ן שייה שלחהו英特尔ו [4.
Dr Joseph Baumgarten has juxtaposed this famous Mishnah in Maseket RH with the incident conveyed in the DSS whereby the priest of the Dead Sea Qumran sect also arrived at a different Yom Kippur calculation than that of the Sadducee Kohen in Jerusalem. The politics of authority and acknowledge of the “true calendrical recogning” for Yom Kippur thus not only have a dimension of astronomical precission and accuracy but also a political dimension of “whose authority? Which calendar? Which Yom Kippur calendrical recockining?”

[40] And here are the translations by V. Lazaris: "Солнце с Луною – их ярче не сыщешь светил,/ Но Мудрости свет все другие светила затмил./ Сверкают короны, алмазный рассыпавши свет,/ Но рядом с короной Мудрости места им нет./... Забудут героев, забудут отважных бойцов,/ И в памяти высекут лишь имена мудрецов./... Кто деньги добыл, тот богатство свое стережет,/ Кто Мудрость нашел, тот счастливым себя назовет./... На трапезу к Мудрости стоит всегда поспешить/ И есть ее хлеб, и вино ее сладкое пить./... Кто льнет к вам с любовью – в друзья не берите таких,/ Дружите лишь с ней, что вернее и ближе других»...

[41] Dr. Fleischer was the head of the Geniza Hebrew Poetry Institute originally founded by Schocken and transplanted to Israel with the rise of Nazi oppression.