Faculty of Letters, History, Philosophy and Theology
West University of Timișoara

ISBE 2026

The 6th International Symposium on Biblical Exegesis



Shechem in Scripture, History, and Tradition Across the Ages

CONFERENCE BOOKLET

ISBE Committee

Fr. Dr. Iosif Stancovici Dr. Ljubica Jovanović

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12–14 November 2026
Online Symposium
Timișoara ※ Romania

◀ Cover image: Christ and the Samaritan Woman (John 4:4–27).
Miniature from a thirteenth-century Gospel manuscript.
Source: https://pravoslavie.ru/46642.html.

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(Samaritan Pentateuch Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

▼ “Members of the Samaritan community take part in a traditional pilgrimage atop Mount Gerizim ahead of the holiday of Shavuot, Nablus, West Bank, May 7, 2026. Photograph by Ammar Awad/Reuters.



וְאָנֹכִי וּבֵיתִי נַעֲבֹד אֶת־יְהוָה

"As for Me and My House, We Will Serve the Lord" (Josh 24:15) Shechem in Scripture, History, and Tradition Across the Ages

ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ ἡ οἰκία μου λατρεύσομεν κυρίῳ



link: meet.google.com/odx-xyvt-ktr

ISBE Committee

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(Timișoara/Sibiu, Romania)

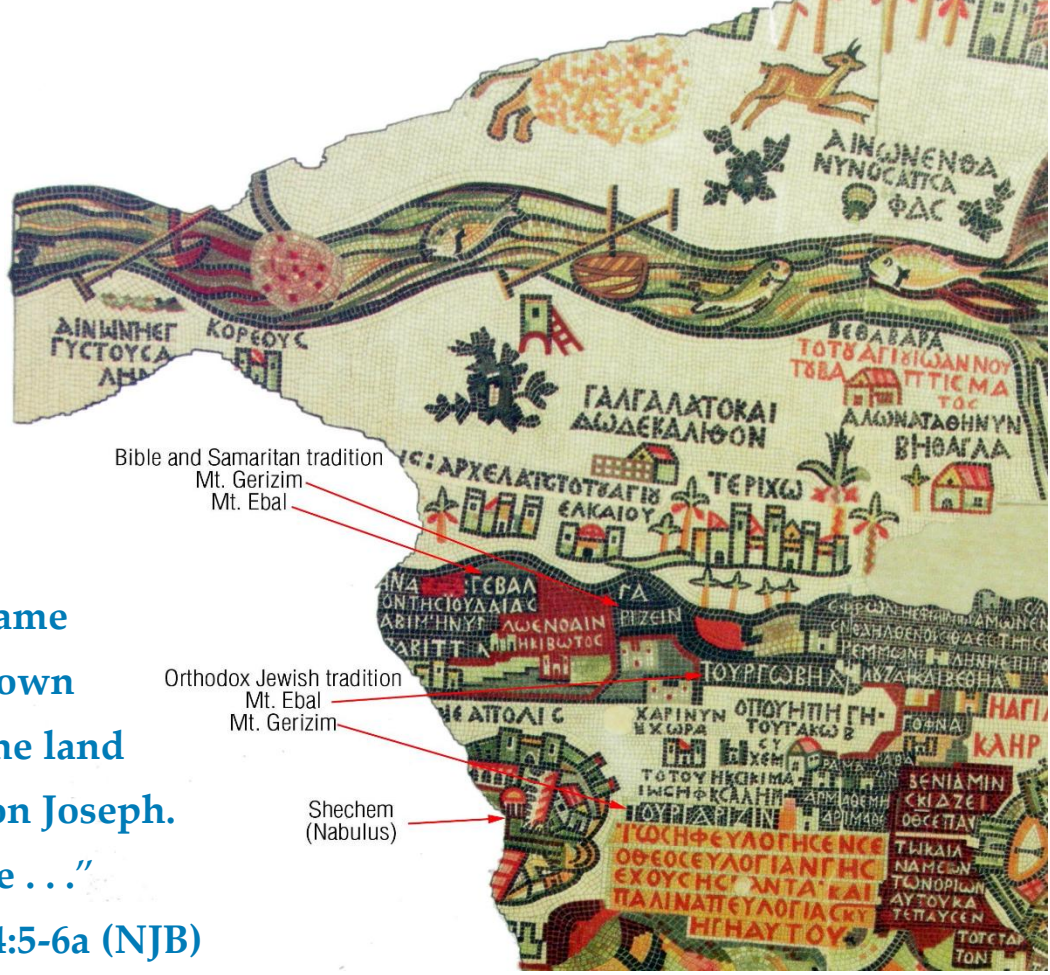
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(Charles Town, WV, United States)

Fr. Dr. John Applegate
(Manchester, United Kingdom)

Fr. Dr. Ioan Mihoc
(Timișoara, Romania)

"On the way he came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well is there . . ."

— John 4:5-6a (NJB)



▲ The Madaba Mosaic Map (6th century AD), St George's Church, Madaba, Jordan. Source: www.bible.ca.

with the assistance of

Fr. Dr. Constantin Oancea

(Sibiu, Romania)

Fr. Dr. Constantin Jinga

(Timișoara, Romania)

Fr. Dr. Srećko Koralija

(Toulouse, France)

Fr. Dr. Marian Vild

(Bucharest, Romania)

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ISBE 2026

Shechem in Scripture, History, and Tradition Across the Ages

SCHEDULE

November 12 (Thursday)	November 13 (Friday)	November 14 (Saturday)
Symposium Inauguration and Session 1 (09:00–11:00) Chair: Fr. Dr. Constantin Jinga	**Session 5** (09:00–11:00) Chair: Fr. Dr. Iosif Stancovici	**Session 9** (09:00–11:00) Chair: Fr. Capodistrias Hämmerli
09:00 Inauguration	09:00 **Dr. Mihai Handaric**	09:00 **Dr. Meira Polliack**
09:20 **Abood Cohen**	09:20 **Dr. Benjamin Kilchör**	09:20 Q&A
09:40 Q&A	09:40 **Fr. Dr. Tomasz Koszarek**	09:40 **Fr. Dr. Iosif Stancovici**
10:00 **Fr. Dr. Olimpiu Nicolae Benea**	10:00 **Dr. Basil Lourié**	10:00 **Luka G. Lukić**
10:20 Q&A	10:20 Q&A	10:20 Q&A
10:40 short break	10:40 short break	10:40 short break
Session 2 (11:00–15:00) Chair: Fr. Dr. Olimpiu Benea	**Session 6** (11:00–15:00) Chair: Fr. Dr. Constantin Jinga	**Session 10** (11:00–15:00) Chair: Dr. Marian Vild
11:00 **Dr. Eusebiu Borca**	11:00 **Dr. Wojciech Kosek**	11:00 **Dr. Alexandru Mihăilă**
11:20 **Dr. Magdalena Burlacu**	11:20 **Dr. Magnus Rabel**	11:20 **Dr. Aleksandar Danilović**
11:40 **Dr. Tobias Siegenthaler**	11:40 **Fr. Dr. Ivan Bodrožić and Maja Rončević**	11:40 **Dr. Linda Saskia Menczel**
12:00 Q&A	12:00 Q&A	12:00 Q&A
12:20 lunch time	12:20 lunch time	12:20 lunch time
Session 3 (15:00–17:00) Chair: Fr. Dr. John Applegate	**Session 7** (15:00–17:00) Chair: Fr. Dr. Ioan Mihoc	**Session 11** (15:00–17:00) Chair: Fr. Dr. Srećko Koralija
15:00 **Fr. Dr. Mihai Ciurea**	15:00 **Dr. József Zsengellér**	15:00 **George Antoniu Nicoară**
15:20 **Dr. Marek Baraniak**	15:20 **Dr. Željko Stanojević**	15:20 **Fr. Dr. Ioan Mihoc**
15:40 **Mariia Boichun**	15:40 **Fr. Dr. Ion Sorin Bora**	15:40 **Fr. Dr. Marian Vild**
16:00 **Fr. Dr. Ionuț Daniel Băncilă**	16:00 **Fr. Dr. John Applegate**	16:00 **Dr. Kees den Biesen**
16:20 Q&A	16:20 Q&A	16:20 Q&A
16:40 short break	16:40 short break	16:30 short break
Session 4 (17:00–18:30) Chair: Dr. Maria Cioată	**Session 8** (17:00–18:00) Chair: Fr. Dr. John Applegate	**Session 12** (17:00–18:00) Chair: Dr. Ljubica Jovanović
17:00 **Dr. Amrei Koch**	17:00 **Mihailo Milenković**	17:00 **Dr. Fotios Apostolos**
17:20 **Dr. Ljubica Jovanović**	17:20 **Fr. Dr. Giuseppe Scollo** (40 min.)	17:20 **Yaroslav Panfilov**
17:40 **Emilija Vuković**		17:40 **Fr. Dr. Srećko Koralija**
18:00 Q&A	18:00 Q&A	18:00 Q&A
18:30 Summary of the first conference day	18:20 Summary of the second conference day	18:20 Summary of the third conference day

Day 1: Thursday, 12 November 2026

Symposium Inauguration and Session 1

Shechem and Mount Gerizim:
Samaritan Sacred Geography and Christian Pilgrimage

09:00–11:00 | Chair: Constantin Jinga

09:00 – Symposium Inauguration

09:20 – Abood Cohen, "Meet the Samaritans: History, Faith, and Life Today"

09:40 – Q&A

10:00 – Olimpiu-Nicolae Benea, "Shechem as a Place of Pilgrimage in Christian Tradition"

10:30 – Q&A

10:40 – Coffee break

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ABOOD COHEN
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"Meet the Samaritans: History, Faith, and Life Today"

Abstract
This presentation introduces Samaritan history, faith, and contemporary life from the perspective of a member of the community on Mount Gerizim. It explores the central place of the Torah and Mount Gerizim in Samaritan religious tradition, alongside practices such as the Passover sacrifice, pilgrimage festivals, and the preservation of Samaritan Hebrew. Through personal reflections and examples from everyday life, the presentation considers how a small community maintains its religious and cultural heritage across generations while participating in the modern world. It also reflects on the role of education and digital media in sharing Samaritan traditions with wider audiences.

Keywords
Mount Gerizim, Samaritan Community, Identity

Biographical Note

Abood Cohen is a member of the Samaritan community living on Mount Gerizim and the grandson of the Samaritan High Priest. Through guided visits, talks, and videos, he introduces audiences to Samaritan history, religious traditions, and everyday life. His work draws on his experience within the community and a commitment to making its heritage accessible to people from different backgrounds. His YouTube channel explores subjects such as Samaritan Hebrew, manuscripts, sacred places, and religious celebrations. In one of the episodes, he interviewed Professor Stefan Schorch (Hebrew University of Jerusalem).

YouTube Channel
https://www.youtube.com/@AboodCohen

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"Shechem as a Place of Pilgrimage in Christian Tradition"

Abstract

Christian pilgrimage to the region of Shechem developed around the memory of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. This paper asks how the place associated with the encounter narrated in John 4 became a destination for travellers and how Christian interpreters understood the relationship between visiting the well and carrying its message home.

The discussion brings pilgrimage accounts into conversation with patristic preaching and Byzantine hymnography. Eusebius' Onomasticon, the Bordeaux itinerary, Jerome's account of Paula's visit, the Piacenza pilgrim, and Adomnán's report of Arculf's journey document successive ways of identifying, visiting, and experiencing the site. Particular attention is given to the vessels associated with the well. The Piacenza pilgrim records a bucket reportedly used by Jesus, while John Chrysostom and Romanos the Melodist interpret the woman's journey and her return to her community. Chrysostom emphasises her initiative in leaving her jar and gathering her fellow citizens; Romanos portrays her return to Sychar as a movement from carrying water to bearing God.

Read together, these sources suggest that Christian pilgrimage to Shechem joined attachment to a remembered place with the sharing of its remembered encounter beyond the site itself. Throughout, the paper distinguishes Christian interpretations of the site from the Samaritan woman's claim to ancestral belonging and the continuing sacred significance of Mount Gerizim for the Samaritan community.

Keywords

Shechem, Christian Pilgrimage, Jacob's Well, Samaritan Woman, John 4, Pilgrimage Literature, Patristic Exegesis, Byzantine Hymnography, John Chrysostom, Romanos the Melodist, Mount Gerizim, Samaritan Tradition.

Biographical Note

Olimpiu-Nicolae Benea is Archdeacon and Associate Professor of New Testament in the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca. His doctoral dissertation focused on the Epistle to the Colossians. His present research concentrates on the Johannine and deutero-Pauline literature and on the reception of the New Testament in patristic and liturgical traditions. He is currently completing a habilitation thesis setting out a contextual-receptive hermeneutics: reading the New Testament within the diversity of Second Temple Judaism, within the Graeco-Roman world, and within the ecclesial tradition in which it was received. His recent work has applied this method to sacred topography in particular – to the pool of Bethesda in John 5, to the cave at Bethlehem, and now to Jacob's well at Sychar. He has participated in the International Symposium on Biblical Exegesis since 2023, contributing to the 2024 volume on Bethlehem and the 2025 volume on the Sermon on the Mount.

Recent Publications

"Contextual Bivalence in John 5: Bethesda between Sabbath Halakhah and Graeco-Roman Therapeutic Cosmology in Patristic Reception," in Ottilia Lukács et.al. (eds.), 'Íme napok jönnek…' (Jer 23,5). Köszöntő kötet Zamfir Korinna tiszteletére, seria *Studia Theologica Transsylvaniensia. Supplementum* 5 (2026): 291–324.

"The Didactic Perspective of Jesus' 'High Priestly Prayer' (John 17)," in Dacian But-Căpușan (ed.), *In honorem Prof. univ. dr. habil. Marcel-Gheorghe Muntean*, Editura Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2025, 145–161

"The House of Wisdom and the Foundation of Christ: Proverbs 14:1 in Rabbinic Tradition, New Testament Exegesis, and Patristic Reception," *Theological Horizons Journal* 2 (2025): 50–103.

"Unity, Mystery, and Transformation: Reading Ephesians and Colossians in Dialogue with Hans Klein's Biblical Theology," *Sacra Scripta* 23 (2025): 11–41.

Day 1: Thursday, 12 November 2026

Session 2

Shechem, Covenant,
and the Biblical-Theological Identity of Israel

11:00–12:20 | Chair: Olimpiu-Nicolae Benea

11:00 – Eusebiu Borca, "Choosing to Serve the Lord: Joshua's Final Speech (Josh 24)"

11:20 – Magdalena Burlacu, "The Stone That Heard: Textual Pluriformity and Patristic Reconfigurations of Joshua 24"

11:40 – Tobias Siegenthaler, "How the Gospel of John Envisions the Inclusion of the Samaritans, the Joseph-People"

12:00 – Q&A

12:20 – Lunch break

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EUSEBIU BORCA, PhD
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"Choosing to Serve the Lord: Joshua's Final Speech (Joshua 24)"

Abstract

In his final address, Joshua speaks to the Israelites about their duty to serve God. To this end, he recalls their history, reminding them that their ancestor Abraham was chosen by God while he was still serving foreign gods. The same was true of Jacob (Israel), who brought deities from Mesopotamia into Canaan, and of the people who later became slaves in Egypt. Yet God delivered them from bondage, protected them throughout their wilderness journey, and fought on their behalf to bring them into the Promised Land.

Following this historical overview (vv. 2–13), Joshua calls the Israelites to serve the Lord, the central theme of his final address. In verses 14–15, the verb "to serve" appears seven times. Its distribution is particularly significant: it refers four times to serving God and frames the two references to serving foreign gods. In verse 15, the verb is closely connected with human freedom, offering the people the opportunity to choose whom they wish to serve.

Joshua thus emphasizes that serving God requires a personal and conscious decision. Although God previously chose Israel as His people, each individual must now freely choose to remain faithful to Him. Joshua himself provides the example, declaring that he and his household will serve the Lord. A threefold dialogue follows, in which the people repeatedly pledge their allegiance to God. Nevertheless, Joshua challenges their enthusiasm, reminding them that genuine service requires more than verbal commitment: it demands concrete actions, a sincere confession, and a heart wholly directed towards God. Ultimately, serving the Lord means an inward

transformation, expressed through the circumcision of the heart, the seat of human emotions and intentions.

Keywords

Joshua, Service to God, Foreign Gods, Human Freedom, Divine Election, Covenant, Choice, Circumcision of the Heart.

Biographical Note

Dr. Eusebiu Borca is Lecturer in Old Testament Studies at the Archbishop Justinian Faculty of Letters, North University Centre of Baia Mare, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. His academic work focuses on Old Testament exegesis and biblical theology, with particular attention to the interpretation of biblical narratives and theological themes.

Recent Publications

"The Veil on Moses' Face, a Characteristic Feature of Mosaic Revelation," *Romanian Orthodox Old Testament Studies* 13.1 (2025): 91–109.

"Abraham's Prayer for Abimelech (Gn 20) – An Old Testament Model of Prayer for One's Neighbor," *Romanian Orthodox Old Testament Studies* 12. 2 (2024): 97–122.

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MAGDALENA BURLACU, PhD
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"The Stone That Heard: Textual Pluriformity and Patristic Reconfigurations of Joshua 24"

Abstract

In the Masoretic form of Joshua 24, the renewal of the covenant is located at Shechem, where Joshua sets up a great stone as a witness because it "has heard" the words spoken by the Lord (Josh 24:26–27). This paper examines how the paradoxical attribution of hearing and testimonial capacity to an inorganic object functions within the covenant scene and how the image is subsequently reconfigured in early Christian exegesis.

The first part considers the relation between written record, material marker, place, and communal memory in Joshua 24. The second part compares three modes of patristic reception: Cyprian's incorporation of the passage into a Christological *lapis* dossier (*Ad Quirinum* II.16), Basil of Caesarea's interpretation of the stone as a material witness the presence of which activates remembrance and conscience (*De Spiritu Sancto* 13.30), and Augustine's extended refiguration of the stone as Christ within a theology of covenant and cross (*Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* VI.30.1).

The paper therefore traces distinct processes of exegetical reconfiguration rather than presupposing a uniform movement from literal to allegorical meaning. It argues that the ability to hear attributed to the stone provides the hermeneutical focus through which material testimony, covenant memory, textual variation, and Christological interpretation are brought into relation.

Keywords

Joshua 24, Shechem, witness stone, covenant memory, textual pluriformity, inorganic imagery, material witness, patristic exegesis, Cyprian, Augustine.

Biographical Note

Magdalena Burlacu is a member of the SNSF research project *IMAGO – How Do Images Speak? The Dynamics of Figures, Metaphors and Symbols in Christian Discourse and Beyond* at the Institute for Old Catholic Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of Bern. She holds a PhD in Theology from the University of Fribourg (2018), with a dissertation on the theology of deification in the writings of John of Damascus and Theodore the Studite.

Her research focuses Greek patristic literature and early Christianity, the theology of images, iconophile writings, deification, and the transmission and recontextualization of patristic sources. Within the IMAGO project, she investigates the circulation and transformation of figures, metaphors, and symbols in early Christian discourse and their later reception, with particular attention to ecclesial imagery.

Recent publications

"Dynamique de l'image et de la déification. Étude de l'image et du temple selon les écrits de Théodore Studite (758–826)," *Studia Patristica* (2026), forthcoming.

"La réception mitigée de saint Syméon le Nouveau Théologien dans l'iconographie ecclésiale," *Contacts: Revue française de l'Orthodoxie* 75.283–284 (2023): 410–436.

Images et déification. La contribution des icônes moldaves médiévales des XVe–XVIIe siècles à la théologie et à l'art byzantin. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, "Cerf Patrimoines," 2022.

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TOBIAS SIEGENTHALER, PhD
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"How the Gospel of John Envisions the Inclusion of the Samaritans, the Joseph-People"

Abstract

It has been recognized that John 4—the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman in Sychar—is composed using the template of "women-at-the-well" stories found in the Torah. These narratives are betrothal stories. By drawing on this template John portrays the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman as a unification of Joseph and Judah as envisioned by Ezekiel 37 and other texts in the Tanakh. John, however, extends the Ezekielian vision to contain not only Joseph and Judah, but all the children of God. According to his theology, they are all united at the sixth hour, the hour at which Jesus meets the woman at the well.

Keywords

Ezekiel 37, Betrothal Type Scene, Joseph, Samaritans, Atonement.

Biographical Note

Tobias Siegenthaler studied at the University of Bern and received his doctorate from the University of St Andrews, where he currently works as a Research Fellow. His research focuses on the Joseph narrative and its literary and theological reception in biblical literature, particularly its relationship with the New Testament. His work explores the compositional significance of Joseph traditions and their influence on later biblical narratives.

Recent Publication

From Joseph to Jesus: The Joseph Narrative as a Compositional Template from Old Greek Esther to the Gospel of Luke. Leuven: Peeters, 2026.

Day 1: Thursday, 12 November 2026

Session 3

Shechem, Mount Gerizim, and Samaritan Traditions in Biblical and Historical Perspective

15:00–17:00 | Chair: John Applegate

15:00 – Mihai Ciurea, "From Mount Gerizim to Jacob's Well: Samaritan Identity and the Encounter with Jesus in the Gospels"

15:20 – Marek I. Baraniak, "Shechem in the Aramaic Targums"

15:40 – Mariia Boichun, "The Chosen Place Inscribed: Mount Gerizim in Samaritan Torah Manuscripts and Their Paratexts"

16:00 – Ionuț Daniel Băncilă, "The Samaritan Origins of Gnosticism: Imagining History in an Out-of-Fashion Historiographical Theory"

16:20 – Q&A

16:40 – Short break

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Fr. MIHAI CIUREA, PhD
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University of Craiova, Romania
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"From Mount Gerizim to Jacob's Well: Samaritan Identity and the Encounter with Jesus in the Gospels"

Abstract

The Samaritan tradition occupies a significant and complex place within the New Testament Gospels, reflecting historical, religious, and theological tensions between Samaritans and Jews while also opening a distinctive perspective on the universality of salvation. This paper examines the representation of Samaria and the Samaritans in the Gospels, with particular attention to the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in John 4:5–42. The Johannine narrative, situated in Sychar and explicitly associated with Jacob and his well, provides a significant setting in which questions of Samaritan identity, sacred space, worship, and messianic expectation converge. Particular attention will be given to the dialogue concerning Mount Gerizim and Jerusalem, through which the Gospel addresses the religious and communal identity of Samaritans and the question of the proper place of worship. The Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus leads beyond the opposition between Gerizim and Jerusalem toward a new understanding of worship "in spirit and truth," while her recognition of Jesus as the Messiah transforms her from a marginal figure into a witness to her community. By placing John 4 within the broader Gospel portrayal of Samaria and the Samaritans, the paper seeks to demonstrate how the New Testament preserves the historical memory of Samaritan-Jewish difference while presenting the encounter with Christ as a transformative event that transcends established ethnic, religious, and geographical boundaries.

Keywords

Samaritans, Samaritan Identity, Mount Gerizim, Jacob's Well, Samaritan Woman, Jesus Christ, Gospels, Sacred Space, Worship.

Biographical Note

Fr. Dr. Mihai Ciurea is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Craiova, where he teaches New Testament and Biblical Greek. His research focuses on topics related to the formation of the New Testament (text and canon), Holy Scripture, biblical exegesis, and biblical philology. His work includes an extensive introduction to New Testament (*koinē*) Greek. His exegetical interests focus particularly on the corpus of Catholic Epistles, expressed in his commentaries on all seven epistles. He is the author of seven books and approximately forty scholarly studies, and has edited collective volumes, translations, and journals. He has benefitted from research and teaching fellowships abroad (Switzerland, Greece, Israel, Syria, Norway, and Bulgaria), and from membership of the editorial boards of journals and of biblical societies in Romania and abroad.

Recent Publications

Comentariu la prima epistola sobornicească a Sfântului Petru [*Commentary on the First Catholic Epistle of Saint Peter*], Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei, 2026.

"Is It All About Money? Ananias and Sapphira in an Ecclesiological Reading," in Viktor Kókai-Nagy and István M. Ledán (eds.), *Canon and Beyond. Reception of Biblical Figures*, Patmosz Könyvtár 21. Debrecen: DRHE Patmosz Kutatóintézet, 2026, 93–131.

"The Last Stone: A Biblical Contextual Study of the Pericope Adulterae," *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa* 70. 2 (2025): 125–142.

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"Shechem in the Aramaic Targums"

Abstract

In the Targums (ancient Aramaic translations and paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible), 'Sychem' (Shechem) is interpreted not merely as a place on a map, but as a symbol of division, betrayal, the reward for righteousness, and a foresight of future redemption. The Targums rarely confine themselves to a literal translation; therefore, an exegetical examination of the rendering of Shechem in the Targumic tradition (particularly in the Book of Genesis) reveals rich theological and messianic layers. Key interpretative features and strategies include: wordplay – 'Shechem' as 'Portion/Part' (Gen 48:22); Shechem as a place of punishment and a moral lesson (Gen 34); the eschatological and messianic perspective; the anti-Samaritan context. So the Targums were not mere literal translations, their purpose was to explain the text and adapt it to the awareness and religious needs of the hearers of the time (often within the synagogue context of the Second Temple period and thereafter).

The Targumist sought to express in the analysed instances concerning Shechem: the defense of a positive image of the Patriarchs; the transition from military history to the theology of merit; the resolution of geographical and logical difficulties, and the embedding of the history within God's cosmic plan (*agadah*).

The interpretation of Sychem in the Targums provides an insight into ancient Jewish exegesis, where geography is frequently transformed into theology and historical narrative into prophetic symbolism.

Keywords

Shechem, Targums, Jewish Exegesis, Aggadah, Book of Genesis.

Biographical Note

Marek I. Baraniak is an Associate Professor at the University of Warsaw, where he has been working for nearly twenty years. He is affiliated with the Faculty of Asian and African Studies, Department of Hebrew Studies (formerly the Faculty of Oriental Studies). His academic research focuses on early Hebrew epigraphy, Aramaic Targums, and early Jewish and Christian literature. His scholarly interests encompass the interpretation and transmission of biblical texts, ancient Jewish exegetical traditions, and the linguistic and rhetorical dimensions of biblical and Semitic literature.

Recent Publications

"Kaddish in Its Different Forms: The Perspective of the Biblical and Semitic Rhetoric," F. Graziano, R. Meynet, and B. Witek (eds.), *Studi del nono convegno RBS*, Leuven–Paris–Bristol: Peeters, 2026, 331–360.

"Eshet Chayil (Prov 31:10–31). The Question of the Rhetorical Composition and Function," in F. Graziano, R. Meynet, and B. Witek (eds.), *Studi del settimo convegno RBS*, *International Studies on Biblical and Semitic Rhetoric*, Leuven–Paris–Bristol: Peeters, 2021, 57–80.

※

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"The Chosen Place Inscribed: Mount Gerizim in Samaritan Torah Manuscripts and Their Paratexts"

Abstract

Shechem lies in the valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Around the latter, Samaritan religious life has been oriented for more than two millennia. This paper asks how the sanctity of Gerizim is inscribed not only in the wording of Samaritan Scripture but in the layout and paratexts of the manuscripts.

A brief orientation to the Samaritan history and tradition, and to the archaeological profile of the Gerizim precinct, as revealed by recent excavations, leads into the paper's central concern, which arises from my doctoral research on the codicology of Samaritan Torah manuscripts: Mount Gerizim is written into the so-called Tenth or "Gerizim" Commandment of the Samaritan Pentateuch. It is invoked in the liturgical texts and named in the colophons, where scribes situate themselves and their work in relation to it, drawing on a vocabulary of sacred space. In addition, Mount Gerizim appears most strikingly in the *tashqil*, the acrostic formed from letters set apart within the written text, whose graphic arrangement in Num 34:1–12 shapes the passage itself into a symbolic figure of the mountain.

Drawing on examples from across the manuscript tradition, the paper argues that Gerizim is inscribed into the Samaritan Torah at every level of its transmission, in what the main text says as much as in how scribes arrange and frame it on the page. Codicology therefore offers a further route into the religious history of a community for whom this mountain is the one chosen place, this route is no less informative than others, and, in its visual forms, is unusually compelling.

Keywords

Samaritans, Mount Gerizim, Shechem, Samaritan Pentateuch, Samaritan Liturgy, Samaritan Torah manuscripts, codicology, paratexts, *tashqil*.

Biographical Note

Mariia Boichun is a doctoral researcher in Biblical Studies at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, where she is preparing a dissertation on the codicological description and analysis of the manuscripts of the Samaritan Pentateuch (16th–20th centuries) under the supervision of Prof. Stefan Schorch. The project aims at a catalogue and database bringing together the complete codicological data of all known textual witnesses: their physical and scribal features as well as the full range of their paratexts.

She completed her MA at the National University of Ostroh Academy in Ukraine with a thesis on the textual tradition of the Antiochene school of exegesis in Adrian of Antioch's treatise "Introduction to the Holy Scriptures". From 2022 to 2023 she studied at the Department of Bible of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, within the framework of "Studium in Israel". Since 2023 she has taught as a visiting lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy and Theology of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv.

Recent Publications

E. Burkhardt, S. Schorch, and M. Boichun, "The Tashqil," in József Zsengellér (ed.), *Samaritans Through the Ages: Studies on Samaritan History, Texts, Interpretation, Linguistics and Manuscripts*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024, 297–354.

Boichun, M. "A. Wilsker-Shumsky's Contribution to Samaritan Studies," in *Proceedings of the International Academic Conference 'XXVII Krymsky's Orientalist Readings' 28 June 2024*, Kyiv–Lviv–Toruń: Liha-Pres, 2024, 173–175.

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"The Samaritan Origins of Gnosticism: Imagining History in an out-of-fashion Historiographical Theory"

Abstract

Historiographical theories, especially concerning such controversial topics as the origins of Gnosticism have their share of imaginative creativity. Due to its countercultural stance, Gnosticism - understood here a set of ancient texts in various languages, sharing a common religious idiom - was in Western scholarship particularly prone to various imaginative accounts, penetrating even the most solid textual, philological and historical research. The case of the Samaritan origins of Gnosticism is not an exception: previously being suggested by renowned polymaths as Moses Gaster (1856-1939), this theory received new scholarly attention after the publication in 1985 of a monograph by a student of Gilles Quispel (1916-2006), when it was enthusiastically received by other leading scholars, as Ioan Petru Culianu (1950-1991). Nevertheless, in the decades that followed, this theory was shrouded in embarrassed silence. My paper will try to assess the imaginative work put in this theory, as an exercise in the broader study of "historical imagination".

Keywords

Gnosticism, Historiography, Samaritan Studies, Origins, historical imagination.

Biographical Note

Dr. Ionuț Daniel Băncilă graduated from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. After a period devoted to learning German and conducting research at the Universities of Marburg and Berlin, he enrolled in the

doctoral program at the Faculty of Protestant Theology at Humboldt University of Berlin, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Christoph Markschies.

His doctoral dissertation addressed the complex issue of the relationship between Manichaeism and Mandaeism. It was published as *Die mandäische Religion und der aramäische Hintergrund des Manichäismus. Forschungsgeschichte, Textvergleiche, historisch-geographische Verortung*. Mandäische Forschungen 6. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018.

His second area of expertise concerns the reception of (Western) esotericism within the predominantly Orthodox cultural context of Eastern Europe and the emergence of an "Orthodox occulture" (echoing the concept of "occulture" proposed by Christopher Partridge).

Recent Publications

"Manichaeism and Mandaeism: A Case of Formative Entanglement," *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies* 10 (2025): 159–208.

"Orthodox Theological Education in Post-communist Romania: Structures, Discourses and a Local Profile," in Nikolaos Asproulis and Natallia Vasilevich (eds.), *The State of Theological Education in Central and East European Universities: Challenges and Prospects in View of Secularization and Globalization*, Studies in Theology and Religion 33. Leiden: Brill, 2025, 225–241.

"Arsenie Boca (1910–1989): zwischen Biologie und Philokalie. Das Projekt einer umfassenden Anthropologie," in Karl Pinggera and Ovidiu Ioan (eds.), *Rumänische geistliche Väter des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Anthologie*, Trier: Paulinus Verlag, 2024, 137–154.

Day 1: Thursday, 12 November 2026

Session 4

Joseph in Jewish and Christian Traditions: Textual, Exegetical, and Visual Reception

17:00–18:30 | Chair: Maria Cioată (University of Manchester)

17:00 – Amrei Koch, "Characters in Opposition: Some Remarks on Joseph and the Antagonists in 4Q372 1"

17:20 – Ljubica Jovanović, "The Interpretations of the Patriarch Joseph's Character in Rabbinic Midrashim and Christian Apocrypha"

17:40 – Emilija Vuković, "Rethinking Inverse Perspective: The Story of Beauteous Joseph at Sopoćani"

18:00 – Q&A

18:20 – Summary of Conference Day 1

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"Characters in Opposition: Some Remarks on Joseph and the Antagonists in 4Q372 1"

Abstract

The fragment 4Q372 1 is widely regarded as containing an anti-Samaritan text. This theory is based on the identification of the "enemy people" (line 20) living in the land as the proto-Samaritans, who practiced their cult on Mount Gerizim. The extant text mainly concerns Joseph, who is held captive by a foreign nation and prays to YHWH for justice and deliverance (lines 16–31). Joseph is clearly portrayed as a protagonist. The people in the land and the foreign nation serve as antagonists, although it is a matter of debate whether these antagonists should be regarded as one and the same people. To address this issue, the present study employs a literary perspective to examine the characters and their characterization within the extant text of 4Q372 1. It focusses on the portrayal of Joseph, the antagonists, and their literary relationship. The paper explores how the historical readers might have interpreted the characters' contrasting natures. Furthermore, it seeks to determine whether the text distinguishes between different groups of "enemies," not all of whom might be aligned with the (proto-)Samaritans. In this context, the paper considers whether the portrayal of Joseph might be an appropriation of a character with whom the Samaritans identified themselves. The use of the figure of Joseph in 4Q372 1 might thus have served to insult the Samaritans, or to connect Joseph more firmly with Zion-based traditions, or both.

By addressing these literary dynamics, this paper contributes to a more nuanced, text-based understanding of 4Q372 1 within its historical context.

Keywords

4Q372 1, Joseph, Samaritans, characterization, antagonists, identity.

Biographical Note

Amrei Koch studied Protestant Theology and earned her doctoral degree at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in 2023. During her doctoral studies she specialized in philological and text historical work on the Hebrew Bible. Her dissertation focused on authorizing structures in the laws of the Covenant Code (Exodus 20,24–23,33) in light of textual history. Her academic development was further shaped by a research visit to Israel. From 2020 to 2024, she served as a research assistant in Old Testament Studies at the Faculty of Theology of the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. In 2024, she became lecturer in Biblical Hebrew at the University of Greifswald. Her research interests lie in the field of textual history and transmission of the Hebrew Bible and literary history of the Second Temple Period. She currently leads a junior research group investigating processes of text production and reception in the Second Temple period, with a particular focus on tradition history and the analysis of Qumran texts. In this context she is working on 4Q372 1 and its historical contextualization.

Recent publications

Autoritätskonstruktion im Recht der Hebräischen Bibel. Rechtsbegründung im Bundesbuch aus textgeschichtlicher und exegetischer Perspektive (BZAW 557), Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2024.

"Sharing God's Property: Wealth and Riches in the Laws of the Pentateuch," in Peter Altmann, Nadine Ueberschaer, and Frank Ueberschaer (eds.), *Is It Good to Be Rich? Answers from the Bible and Antiquity* (WUNT XX), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2025, 27–48.

"Beyond Divine Law – Varied Constitution of Meaning in the Covenant Code in Light of Its Textual History," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 11 (2025), 22–40.

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"Interpretations of Patriarch Joseph's Character in Rabbinic Midrashim and Christian 'Apocrypha'"

Abstract

Excluding philosophical, theological, and liturgical interpretations of Joseph, this presentation examines varying understandings of Joseph's character development, education, and filial relationship with his father, Jacob. My study identifies several recurring patterns. Two seemingly opposite representations are especially prominent. In one, Joseph is portrayed as ignorant while at home, receives his education in Egypt, and steadily develops in character, knowledge, and communication with God, as in *The Ethiopic Story of Joseph*. This image contrasts with depictions of Joseph as having received both his education and faith in God in Israel. In these accounts, his success in Egypt is attributed solely to the faith of his father, Jacob, which Joseph preserves despite the temptations of the Egyptian way of life. In the first case, Joseph appears as a more genuine believer than his father; in the second, Jacob is elevated above Joseph. This latter interpretation usually presents Joseph as calling on his father, Jacob, when in trouble, rather than appealing directly to God. I will seek to identify the religious and historical contexts underlying different interpretations of Joseph's personality and values.

Keywords

Patriarch Joseph, Jacob, memra, midrash, Ethiopic Joseph, cup of divination, Hellenistic, Yashar, Genesis Rabba, Joseph in Syriac, Targums.

Biographical Note

Ljubica Jovanović is a graduate of National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, School of Theology (B.Th., 1996). She completed her master and doctoral studies at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. USA: M.T.S. (1998); M.A. in Religion (2003) and PhD in Religion (2007). Her revised doctoral thesis was published in as *The Joseph of Genesis as Hellenistic Scientist*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 48, Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2013.

Dr. Jovanović's expertise is in the Old Testament with a focus on the Hellenistic period. Her special interest in Old Slavonic Religious Literature and its relation to the Sacred Scriptures started during her doctoral dissertation with her research on *Joseph and Aseneth*. The importance of its South-Slavonic version, *Žitie Asenethi*, for scholarship of pseudepigrapha both as a translation and an original work led to an article, "Aseneth's Gaze Turns Swords into Dust," *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* 21:2 (2011): 83–97. Several publications and conference presentations revolve about her interest in the figure of Patriarch Joseph in Christian literature, art, and liturgy.

Dr. Ljubica Jovanović is currently on the faculty of the American Public University System, Union College of New Jersey, and Seton Hall University. She has taught courses at Cornell University, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and Vanderbilt University.

Recent Publications

"The Invention of Slavonic Apocrypha," *Slovo*, Staroslavenski Institute, forthcoming.

"Theatrical Performance of the Joseph Story: The Ethiopic Story of Joseph," *Religions* 17.10 (2026): 1156.

"The Legacy of the Iconophile Theology of Vita Constantini," in Emil Hilton Saggau/Wawrzyniec Kowalski/Mihai Dragnea (eds.), *Saints in the Slavic Christian World* (South-East European History 15), Peter Lang, 2025, 23–45.

"The Figure of Joseph in the South Slavonic Homily about Fasting, and Joseph, and the Priest, and the Prophet David," in M. Cioată, A. Miltenova, and E. Timotin (eds.), *Biblical Apocrypha in South-Eastern Europe and Related Areas:*

Proceedings of the Session Held at the 12th International Congress of South-East European Studies (Bucharest, 2–6 September 2019), Brăila: Istros, 2021, 73–87.

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"Rethinking Inverse Perspective: The Story of Beauteous Joseph at Sopoćani"

Abstract

Depicted directly above the entrance doorway on the western wall of the narthex of Sopoćani Monastery, the cycle of Beauteous Joseph presents a sweeping visual narrative that begins in the upper southern zone and unfolds across four registers. It consists of sixteen scenes, each framed by architectural elements rendered in inverse perspective. Although these frescoes have been extensively studied from stylistic, iconographic, and iconological perspectives, their architectural frames have remained largely overlooked—a notable gap, given the formal diversity of these elements, which makes the cycle an exceptional corpus for studying classicizing forms within such spatial conventions. Drawing on recent research into human perception of space, this paper examines these architectural frameworks through the lens of neurocognitive art history. It thus explores how empirical findings on perception and cognition can deepen our understanding of inverse perspective in Byzantine monumental painting.

Keywords

The Beauteous Joseph, Sopoćani, Byzantine monumental painting, neurocognition.

Biographical Note

Emilija Vuković is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Art History at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. Her research interests encompass Byzantine art and architecture, Serbian medieval art, art history methodology and theory, neuroarthistory, cognitive neuroscience and art, and medievalism in modern digital media. During her academic career, has worked at the Faculty of Philosophy as both a teaching assistant and researcher. She has published articles participated in numerous national and international conferences.

Recent Publications

"A Contribution to the Study of the Kumanica Tetraevangelion (Archive SASA no. 69)," in Ioan Mihoc and Iosif Stancovic (eds.), *Fides quae per caritatem operatur – Studi biblice*, Iași, 2023, 263–75.

"The Byzantine Representations of the Himation as a Possible Tool for Defining Specific Authorial Features of the Painters? A Connoisseurship Approach," *Изкуствоведски четения* 1 (2019): 337–57.

Day 2: Friday, 13 November 2026

Session 5

Shechem, Shiloh, and the Historical and Religious Traditions of Ancient Israel

09:00–11:00 | Chair: Iosif Stancovici

09:00 – Mihai Handaric, “Shechem, the First Altar Built by Abraham upon Arrival in the Promised Land”

09:20 – Benjamin Kilchör, “Was There a Writing Culture in Shechem and Shiloh during Iron Age I?”

09:40 – Tomasz Koszarek, “Power, Kinship, and Urban Elites in Shechem: A Sociological Reading of Judges 9”

10:00 – Basil Lourié, “From the Fall of the Watchers to the Sukkot in Shiloh: Judges 19–21”

10:20 – Q&A

10:40 – Short break

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"Shechem, the First Altar Built by Abraham upon Arrival in the Promised Land"

Abstract

This paper discusses the biblical significance of the first altar built by Abraham at Shechem upon his arrival in the Promised Land. Shechem is presented as the geographical location that highlights the human response to Yahweh's call. In this context, Yahweh reiterates the promise made to Abraham, concerning his seed and a land (Gen 12: 6a). "Abram built an altar there to the Lord" (Gen 12: 6b). At Shechem, Abraham celebrated his partnership with Yahweh, who had issued the call. I aim to demonstrate that this altar has a paradigmatic significance. I will address the context of the building of the altar, the man called by Yahweh, and the content of the divine promise: a people and a land. It will be observed that each fulfillment of this promise was marked by the building of new altars at Shechem. I will focus on Jacob (Israel) who, upon returning from Padan-aram to Canaan (the Promised Land), built an altar at Shechem together with his sons, who would later form the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 33: 18, 20). Next, I will present the fulfillment of the second part of the promise made to Abraham: The Promised Land. I will discuss the covenant established between Israel and Yahweh at Shechem during the time of Joshua, following Israel's return from Egyptian bondage and the conquest of Canaan (Joshua 24:1–28).

Keywords

Abraham, Canaan, Shechem, first altar, offspring, land.

Biographical Note

Since 2017 Mihai Handaric has been Associate Professor at *"Aurel Vlaicu" University in Arad*, where he has been working since 2008 (first as lecturer). Before that he taught at *"Emanuel" University of Oradea*.

He obtained his BA in theology from the Faculty of Pentecostal Theology in Arad, within the Pentecostal Theological Institute Bucharest; MA in Theology at Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA, USA; MDiv from Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Minneapolis, Minnesota. In 2005 he completed his PhD in Biblical Studies (Old Testament) from the Protestant Theological Institute in Cluj-Napoca.

His areas of interest include Biblical Studies, apologetics, hermeneutics and historical theology. He has written seven books, edited three volumes and contributed over 40 articles to books and journals. His books include: *Tratat de istoria interpretării Teologiei Vechiului Testament: evoluţia cercetării în România, Europa occidentală şi spaţiul anglo-saxon* [*Treaty on Interpreting the History of Old Testament Theology: Research Developments in Romania, in Western Europe and Anglo-Saxon World*] (Arad: Carmel Print, 2007), *Introducere în Vechiul Testament* [*Introduction to the Old Testament*] (Arad: University Press, 2009 2nd ed.) and *Istoria Bisericii în spațiul existenței umane* [*Church History in the context of human existence*] (Cluj-Napoca: Risoprint and Arad: University Press, 2019).

Recent publications

"Faith as a proper answer in crisis: Expecting God's intervention from Habakkuk's Perspective - Hab. 1:1-2:4," in Croatian: "Vjera kao najbolji mogući odgovor u kriznim vremenima: Očekujući Božju intervenciju iz Habakukove perspektve – Habakuk 1:1-2:4," in *KAIROS*: *Evangelical Journal of Theology* 25. 1 (2021): 65–80.

"The biblical perspective on the Helpmate in marriage," *Teologia* 86.1 (2021): 112–34.

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"Was There a Writing Culture in Shechem and Shiloh during Iron Age I?"

Abstract

The prevailing paradigm that Israel did not have a writing culture capable of producing literary texts until the 8th century BCE, has been called into question in recent years for various reasons. Among other things, several alphabetic inscriptions from the 12th-10th centuries BCE have been found in the territory of Israel over the past 20 years, and there is a growing understanding that there was no interruption in the writing culture in the Levant after the Late Bronze Age. However, the inscriptions are mainly found in the Shephelah and other peripheral areas of Israel, rather than in the heartland. This paper will examine the probability or possibility that a writing culture existed in places such as Shechem or Shiloh, which, according to the Bible, played a central role in the pre-state period of Israel.

Keywords

Scribal Culture, Iron Age I, Epigraphy, Shechem, Shiloh, Pre-monarchic Israel.

Biographical Note

Benjamin Kilchör is professor of Old Testament studies and prorector at Staatsunabhängige Theologische Hochschule Basel. His publications include *Jahwetora und Mosetora: Das Verhältnis von Deuteronomium 12–26 zu Exodus, Levitikus und Numeri* (Harrassowitz, 2015) and *Wiederhergestellter Gottesdienst: Eine Deutung der zweiten Tempelvision Ezechiels (Ez 40–48) am Beispiel der Aufgaben der Priester und Leviten* (Herder, 2020). He is currently working on a literary history of the Old Testament that devotes particular attention to scribal culture in ancient Israel.

Recent Publications

Christian Frevel, Benjamin Kilchör, and Craig A. Evans (eds.), *The Book of Numbers. Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, VTS 202, Leiden: Brill, 2026.

Benjamin Kilchör, "The Language of Creation: The Name of God and the Naming of Creatures in Genesis 1-11," in David B. Schreiner, Mark A. Awabdy, and Drew S. Holland (eds.), *God of the Fathers. Conceptualizations of Divinity in Genesis and Deuteronomy. A Festschrift for Bill T. Arnold*, BZAR 32, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2026, 77–93.

Benjamin Kilchör, "Das Deuteronomium als synchroner und diachroner Abschluss des Pentateuch," *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 31 (2025): 143–152.

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"Power, Kinship, and Urban Elites in Shechem: A Sociological Reading of Judges 9"

Abstract

The narrative of Abimelech in Judges 9 is one of the most important biblical texts for the sociological analysis of power, kinship, urbanization, and political legitimacy in ancient Israel, in the example of Shechem. In this paper I will apply a sociological and socio-historical approach to Judges 9 in order to examine the social structures, mechanisms of authority, and ideological tensions reflected in the narrative.

Particular attention is devoted to the role of Shechem as an urban and political center, the significance of kinship and family identity in the struggle for leadership, and the conflict between charismatic authority and emerging proto-monarchical structures. The study analyzes the interaction between local elites, clan loyalties, economic resources, and religious institutions that enabled Abimelech's rise to power. Jotham's fable is interpreted as an ideological critique of illegitimate kingship and

violent political domination. Other themes which are explored include patronage, social conflict, collective identity, urban-rural tensions, and the sociological function of the text as a warning against tyranny and the manipulation of religion for political purposes. Judges 9 thus emerges not merely as a historical narrative, but as a sophisticated reflection on the dangers of authority lacking communal and divine legitimacy.

Keywords

Judges 9, Abimelech, Shechem, sociological criticism, kinship, political legitimacy, urban elites, leadership.

Biographical Note

Tomasz Koszarek is a Roman Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Kraków (Poland) and a biblical scholar specializing in the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament, with particular interest in the Book of Judges and prophetic literature. He completed his Doctorate in Biblical Sciences and Archaeology at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem, with a dissertation entitled *The* rîb *Genre in Jotham's Speech (Jdg 9:7g–20) and in Other Old Testament Texts*.

His research focuses on biblical exegesis, Hebrew language, and literary analysis of biblical texts. He published several scholarly articles in international biblical journals and collective volumes. Since 2025 he has served as a university lecturer at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem.

In addition to his academic work, he is an experienced guide in the Holy Land and in the Polish mountains, combining biblical scholarship with historical and geographical expertise.

Recent Publications

"Job in Jerusalem? Possible Origin of the Legend of Job's Spring in Ein Rogel and Other Holy Land Traditions," in A. Coniglio (ed.), *"Sion sarà il luogo del mio riposo per sempre, qui abiterò perché l'ho voluto" (Sal 132,14). Saggi di semitistica in onore di Massimo Pazzini, ofm*, SBF Analecta 99, Milano: Terra Santa Edizioni, 2026, 303–326.

"The *rîb* Literary Pattern in Isaiah 1–5 as the *casus belli* in the Book of Isaiah," *Studia Biblica Slovaca* 17.1 (2025): 18–59.

"The Structure and Poetic Elements of Jotham's Speech (Judg 9:7g-20)," *Studia Biblica Slovaca* 16.2 (2024): 201–29.

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"From the Fall of the Watchers to the Sukkot in Shiloh: Judges 19-21"

Abstract

The story of the Levite and his wife was initially a separate text (cf. Cyntia Edenburg, 2016). It still preserves a number of chronological marks and remnants of a poetic composition; such facts, combined with some apparently unnecessary details of the account, give the impression of an etiological legend explaining some feast(s) within the annual liturgical cycle. I have come to view this narrative as part of a cycle, where the wife is killed as an inversed Passover sacrifice (interpreted as a kind of *Shelamim*) exactly on Passover, the main victory over the Beniaminites took place during Pentecost (which has meaning of renovation of the Covenant), and the final festivity is *Sukkot*. The very beginning of the story (separation of the wife from her husband) took place on 8.IX, the festive date preserved in some late Jewish and Christian calendars, where it is dedicated to angels. This provides a key to the earliest background of the story related to the legend preserved by 1 Enoch 6-9. Initially, it was a story about reparation of sin with the Watchers.

Keywords

Judges 19-21, Watchers, 1 Enoch, Jewish liturgical calendars

Biographical Note

Basil Lourié is the founder and editor-in-chief of *Scrinium: Journal of Patrology and Critical Hagiography* (Leiden: Brill; since 2005). His main fields of interests are history of Christian tradition throughout the Christian East and Christian theology, including

Christian Origins within Jewish traditions of the Second Temple period, with special attention to hagiography and liturgy. Since 2025 he is the Head of the Laboratory of Christian Orient of the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Yerevan, Armania. He also is a member of the Editorial Board of the Complete Works by Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov (published by the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin's House) of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Russian Historical Museum) with responsibility for theological works.

Recent Publications

"A Monothelite Syriac Compilation of Pseudo-Apostolic Acts Preserved only in Slavonic and the Entrance of Constans II into Rome in 663," in Maria Cioată, Anissava Miltenova, and Emanuela Timotin (eds.), *Biblical Apocrypha in South-Eastern Europe and Related Areas*, BIESEE 16, Brăila: Istros, 2021, 125-217.

"The Jewish and Early Christian Background of the Earliest Islamic Liturgical Calander," in Carlos A. Segovia (ed.), *Remapping Emergent Islam: Texts, Social Settings, and Ideological Trajectories*, Amsterdam: University Press, 2020, 131-48.

"The Liturgical Cycle in *3 Maccabees* and the *2 Enoch* Calendar," in Marc Leroy and Martin Staszak (eds.), *Perceptions du temps dans la Bible*, Études bibliques. Nouvelle série 77, Leuven—Paris—Bristol: Peeters, 2018, 156–170.

Day 2: Friday, 13 November 2026

Session 6

Shechem, Covenant, and the Interpretation of Israel's Biblical Traditions

11:00–12:20 | Chair: Constantin Jinga

11:00 – Wojciech Kosek, "From the Sea to Shechem: The Jordan Crossing, Ebal, and the Covenant Logic of Joshua"

11:20 – Magnus Rabel, "Shechem Erased, Shechem Restored: Joshua 24 in Greek"

11:40 – Ivan Bodrožić and Maja Rončević, "Shechem and the Reconfiguration of Israelite Identity in Jerome's Biblical Exegesis"

12:00 Q&A

12:20 Lunch break

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"From the Sea to Shechem: The Jordan Crossing, Ebal, and the Covenant Logic of Joshua"

Abstract

This paper investigates whether the Book of Joshua presents the generation raised up in place of their fathers as passing through a sequence of covenant-related events that echoes the earlier Mosaic sequence. Three correspondences are central to the inquiry: the crossing of the divided sea and the crossing of the Jordan; Sinai and the ceremony at Mount Ebal and Gerizim; and the covenant in the plains of Moab and the covenant at Shechem.

Particular attention will be given to the narrative interval separating the first and second events in each sequence. After the sea crossing and before Sinai, YHWH provides for Israel through water, food, rest, and victory over Amalek. A comparable interval appears between the Jordan crossing and Ebal/Gerizim: Israel begins to eat from the produce of the land, is protected while recovering from circumcision, and experiences both YHWH's military protection and the consequences of covenant violation in the episodes of Jericho and Ai.

Within this broader structure, Joshua 5:7 is especially significant: the sons are raised up in place of their fathers. The paper therefore asks whether this text gives the successor generation its own participation in the foundational pattern experienced by the Exodus generation, and whether the crossing is to be understood merely as a recapitulation of the sea or also as an act of covenant-making.

The textual location of Josh 8:30–35 will serve as a test of this proposed macrostructure. The trajectory culminates in Joshua 24, where Shechem becomes the setting for an explicit covenant, exclusive loyalty to YHWH, and the transmission of covenant identity across generations.

Keywords

Joshua; Exodus; Jordan crossing; Mount Ebal; Shechem; covenant; Masoretic Text; 4QJoshua[a]

Biographical Note

Wojciech Kosek is an independent biblical scholar whose research focuses on the literary structure and covenant theology of the Bible, especially Exodus 1–18, the Passover tradition, and the relationship between biblical narrative and Ancient Near Eastern covenant forms. He received his PhD in Theology in 2008 from the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Kraków. His dissertation was entitled *The Original Rite of the Passover in the Light of the Literary Scheme of the Book of Exodus 1–18*. His work argues that Exodus 1–18 forms a coherent covenant treaty and that the passage through the divided sea belongs to the covenant-making process between YHWH and Israel. His broader research examines typological relationships between the Old and New Testaments, especially between Genesis 15, Exodus 1–18, and the Gospel of John, as well as the liturgical dimension of covenant theology in Passover and the Eucharist. His current research develops this covenantal and typological model in relation to the Book of Joshua, examining the crossing of the Jordan, Mount Ebal and Gerizim, and Shechem as interconnected stages in the re-presentation, transmission, and renewal of Israel's covenant relationship with YHWH.

Recent Publications

"The Anamnesis Sacrifice of Christ (1 Cor 11, 23–26) as An Offering to the Father for His Victory in the Battle Against the Devil and for His Glorious Return to Those Gathered in the Cenacle," *Teologia* 99.2 (2024): 182–224.

"The Covenant-Making in Ex 1–18 on the Background of the Ancient Near Eastern Customs," originally published as *Zawarcie przymierza w Wj 1–18 na tle zwyczajów Bliskiego Wschodu*, in T. Jelonek and R. Bogacz (eds.), *Między Biblią a kulturą I*, Kraków 2011, 9–32.

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"Shechem Erased, Shechem Restored: Joshua 24 in Greek"

Abstract

In the oldest Greek text of Joshua, the covenant of chapter 24 is not made at Shechem. Codex Vaticanus has Joshua gather the tribes at Shiloh (24:1) and give them law and ordinance there, before the tent of the God of Israel (24:25), a phrase with no counterpart in the Hebrew. Shechem keeps the grave of Joseph and the field bought from the Amorites (24:32), and loses the covenant and the sanctuary. The change has been explained as anti-Samaritan polemic, as harmonisation with the camp at Shiloh in Joshua 18:1, and as the scruple of a translator who would not have a covenant made away from a legitimate sanctuary.

This paper does not offer a fourth explanation for this particularity of the Old Greek. Instead, it explores the subsequent versions. Aquila and Symmachus restore Shechem at both verses, Symmachus writing ἐν Σικίμοις at 24:25, and the Syrohexapla marks the words about the tent with an obelus, so that Origen found nothing for them in his Hebrew either. The manuscripts preserve a disagreement about Shechem carried on across three centuries, and a translator's slip would not have been worth correcting twice.

The same subordination of Shechem to Shiloh appears outside Greek Joshua. Pseudo-Philo places Joshua's farewell speech at Shiloh, Josephus has the ceremony at Shechem only after the tent has been pitched at Shiloh, and the account of the first altar in the land stands at three different points in the Masoretic text, in the Greek, and in 4QJoshua^{a}. What is disputed in all of this is the standing of Shechem as a place of worship, which is exactly the question the Samaritan woman asks Jesus in John 4:20.

Keywords

Shechem, Shiloh, Joshua 24, Septuagint, Codex Vaticanus, Aquila, Symmachus, Hexapla, Samaritans, textual criticism, John 4.

Biographical Note

Magnus Rabel studied Protestant Theology at the universities of Tübingen, Basel, Marburg, Giessen, and Aberdeen between 2015 and 2021. He completed his Master of Theology (MTh) in Biblical Studies at the University of Aberdeen in 2021. From 2022 to 2025, he pursued his doctoral research at the University of Zurich under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Jörg Frey. His dissertation, *Der erinnerte Joseph – Eine wandernde Figur und ihre Geschichte in der Hebräischen Bibel, im antiken Judentum und im frühen Christentum*, was accepted in 2025.

From January to July 2026, he was a Visiting Scholar at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, supported by a postdoctoral fellowship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Since September 2026, he is a Research Associate at Keble College, University of Oxford, supported by a Feodor Lynen Fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

Recent Publications (selection)

Der erinnerte Joseph. Eine wandernde Figur und ihre Geschichte in der Hebräischen Bibel, im antiken Judentum und im frühen Christentum. WUNT II/646. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2025.

"Chasing Lovers. Sexuality, Eroticism, and Romance as a Narrative Driver in Joseph and Aseneth," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 33 (2026): 133–155.

"Dreaming Big. On Expanding Dreams, Hubris, and the Character of the Biblical Joseph," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 48.4 (2024): 494–512.

"Developing Joseph's Character. Narratological Reflections on the Dynamic Character of the Biblical Joseph," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 68.1 (2024): 1–26.

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"Shechem and the Reconfiguration of Israelite Identity in Jerome's Biblical Exegesis"

Abstract

St Jerome, one of the foremost exegetes of Christian antiquity, is best known for interpreting the prophetic books. He also provided Western readers with tools for understanding the biblical writings, notably the *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* and the *De situ et nominibus locorum Hebraicorum*, his reworking of Eusebius' *Onomasticon*. His command of Greek and his residence in Bethlehem gave him first-hand knowledge of the topography of the Holy Land. He devotes no systematic treatise to Shechem but mentions it repeatedly in his commentaries.

This paper argues that Jerome's works offer rich, yet underexplored, material for reflecting on the reconfiguration of Israelite identity in late antique Christian exegesis. In the Bible, Shechem is a nexus of multiple definitions of "Israel". The patriarchal covenant, tribal inheritance, the division of the kingdom, and the Samaritan cult converge there. Jerome inherits these layers and deliberately reshapes them. In his commentary on Hos 6:9 (*Commentarii in Osee*), Shechem becomes the site of contention between the northern and southern kingdoms, Bethel and Jerusalem, Ephraim and

Judah, raising the question of who may bear the name "Israel". In the *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim*, on Gen 48:22, Jerome discusses the word *Sichem* and presents Shechem as Joseph's inheritance. The entry *Sichem* in his adaptation of the *Onomasticon* condenses the city's history through the patriarchs, the conquest and the monarchy. In Epistle 108, describing St Paula's pilgrimage, Shechem becomes the place where Christ meets the Samaritan woman, so that the patriarchal, Samaritan and Christian layers of a single toponym merge. Jerome also reads Hos 6:9 allegorically as a path "from good works" towards the Church. Shechem thus emerges as a multilayered site of biblical memory, where philology, geography and exegesis together serve the Christian reconfiguration of "Israel" from an ethnic and territorial category into an ecclesial and typological one.

Keywords

St Jerome, Shechem, Israelite identity, late antique Christian exegesis, Samaritans, biblical geography, typology, reconfiguration of "Israel".

Biographical Note

Ivan Bodrožić is Professor at the Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Split, where he teaches in the Department of the History of Christian Literature and Christian Doctrine. He began his philosophical and theological studies at the School of Theology in Split and completed the final four years of his studies at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (Santa Croce) in Rome, graduating in 1994.

He went on to pursue postgraduate studies in Patrology at the Patristic Institute Augustinianum in Rome, where he earned his PhD in 2000 with a dissertation entitled "Numerology in the Thought of St Augustine." In 2007, he became a member of the Association Internationale d'Études Patristiques (AIEP). Over the course of his academic career, he has taken part in and led a number of research projects and has organized numerous academic conferences.

He is the Head of the Hieronymianum Research Centre, which focuses on the life and works of St Jerome. Since the 2025/2026 academic year, he has served as Dean of the Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Split.

Maja Rončević graduated from the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Split in 2014 with a thesis entitled "Augustine's Conversion: A Hermeneutical Key to Contemporary Conversions," supervised by Prof. Ante Vučković. Since 2021, she has

been pursuing her doctoral studies at the same university. She has participated in a number of national and international conferences and symposia on patristics (in Croatia, Italy, Poland, Malta, Serbia, the United Kingdom, and Canada) and has published in Croatian and international academic journals.

From 2023 to 2024, she served as Assistant Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Crkva u svijetu*. In 2024, she joined the international research project "The Encounter-Conflict Relation between Christianity and Islam in Dalmatia from the 16th to the 18th Century: Relevance for the Present and Future" as a Research Associate.

Most Recent Publications

Ivan Bodrožić – Maja Rončević, "Il mistero di Dio tra velato e rivelato nel linguaggio scritturistico secondo Girolamo," in Pontificio Istituto Patristico Augustinianum (ed.), *Parole per dire Dio. Il linguaggio teologico nell'antichità cristiana*, Florence: Nerbini International; Pontificium Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2026.

Ivan Bodrožić – Maja Rončević, "Garden of Eden or a Place of Temptation and Fear: St. Jerome about the Desert according to His Hagiographies," *Studia Patristica* CXXXI – *Christians of the Patristic Period in Relation to Nature* (2024): 297–312.

Ivan Bodrožić – Maja Rončević, "True Faith and Philosophy as a Way to Overcome Religious Prejudices according to 1st and 2nd Century Christian Sources," *History in Flux* 5.5 (2023): 7–30.

Day 2: Friday, 13 November 2026

Session 7

Archaeology, Sacred Geography, and the Historical Memory of Shechem

15:00–17:00 | Chair: Ioan Mihoc

15:00 – József Zsengellér, "Text and Archaeology: Mount Gerizim in Recent Research"

15:20 – Željko Stanojević, "The Name Shechem (שְׁכֶם): Comparative Semitic Etymology, Topographic Motivation, and Biblical Usage"

15:40 – Ion Sorin Bora, "Shechem, Gerizim, and Ebal: Sacred Geography, Memory, and Identity in Joshua 8 and 24"

16:00 – John Applegate, "'Eighty Men from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria': A Note on the Murderous Text of Jeremiah 41"

16:20 – Q&A

16:40 – Short break

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"Text and Archaeology: Mount Gerizim in Recent Research"

Abstract

Shechem and its sacred mountain, Gerizim, are well known topics in the biblical books reflecting pre-monarchic Israel (Deuteronomy, Joshusa, and Judges). Although Shechem's religious importance was maintained in both monarchic and post-exilic stories, Gerizim was not mentioned at all. It was only in the Hellenistic-Roman historiographical works of 2 Maccabees and Josephus's Jewish Antiquities that Gerizim was mentioned again, and surprisingly they refer to a temple on the mount. The scholarly consensus of the 19th and 20th centuries denied the existence of such a temple, but excavations by Yitzhak Magen at the turn of the millennium evidenced not only to a Hellenistic, but also a Persian period temple on the top of Gerizim. The international scholarly community is accepting the idea very slowly and still with skepticism, as it contradicts the long-held scholarly consensus. In this paper I briefly review the textual sources relating to Mount Gerizim and present the history and results of the archaeological discoveries of the temple. In conclusion I highlight the historical, religious and political implications of the new findings.

Keywords

Mount Gerizim, archaeology, Gerizim-temple, 2 Maccabees, Josephus, Samaritans.

Biographical Note

Prof. Dr. József Zsengellér is a Reformed minister and Hebraist. His research interests include the textual and canonical history of the Hebrew Bible, the history and religion of ancient Israel, especially in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, Second Temple Jewish literature, the history and literature of the Samaritan community, and the Samaritan Pentateuch. He earned his theological degree from the Budapest Reformed Theological Academy, an MA in Hebrew Studies from Eötvös Loránd University, and his PhD from Utrecht University in 1998. In 2025 he was awarded the title Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (DSc). His DSc dissertation examined the development and plurality of ancient Yahwistic groups from the Bronze Age to John Hyrcanus.

Zsengellér is Professor of Hebrew Bible and Jewish Studies at the Országos Rabbiképző – Zsidó Egyetem (Jewish Theological Seminary – University of Jewish Studies), Budapest, where he also serves as President of the Doctoral Council. Previously he served as Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Theology and later as Rector of Károli Gáspár University. He has led and participated in numerous research projects on biblical textual history, deuterocanonical literature, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Septuagint.

Recent publications

"Samaritans," in D. Cielontko et al. (eds.), *The World of the New Testament: Encountering Texts in Context*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2026, 405–20.

Samaritans Through the Ages: Studies on Samaritan History, Texts, Interpretation, Linguistics and Manuscripts. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024.

"A garizimi templom mint trójai faló" ["The Temple of Gerizim as a Trojan Horse"] *Ókor* 23 (2024): 3–12. (In Hungarian).

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"The Name Shechem (שְׁכֶם): Comparative Semitic Etymology, Topographic Motivation, and Biblical Usage"

Abstract

This paper investigates the etymology of the toponym Shechem (Hebrew שְׁכֶם) through comparative Semitic linguistics, historical phonology, and onomastic analysis. It asks to what extent the traditional association of the name with the noun "shoulder" is based on historically verifiable linguistic evidence rather than a retrospective interpretation of the city's geographical setting. The study examines the earliest Egyptian and cuneiform attestations, the Hebrew form, and relevant lexical parallels across Semitic languages, distinguishing attested forms from reconstructions. Particular attention is devoted to consonantal correspondences, vocalization, and possible morphological elements in early spellings, together with the limitations imposed by writing systems used to represent foreign names. Topographic motivation is evaluated independently against historical attestations and comparable naming patterns. The relationship between the place name and the personal name Shechem in Genesis 34 is also considered without presupposing their direction of derivation. The biblical analysis focuses on Genesis 12:6; 33:18–20; 34; and 48:22, alongside Joshua 24. It examines the possible wordplay in Genesis 48:22 and the interaction between the geographical name, narrative associations, and Shechem's presentation as a setting for covenant commitment.

This contribution is an integrated assessment of etymological proposals using explicit criteria: chronological priority, regular phonological correspondences, morphological plausibility, and semantic probability. By distinguishing historical etymology from biblical interpretation, the paper seeks to establish a philological

foundation for understanding Shechem in scriptural tradition, including the setting of the declaration, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

Keywords

Shechem, comparative Semitic etymology, onomastics, toponymy, historical phonology, Northwest Semitic languages, topographic motivation, Hebrew Bible, Genesis, Joshua 24.

Biographical Note

Željko Stanojević is a Hebraist, linguist, and scholar of biblical philology whose work focuses on the Hebrew language, biblical onomastics, and the interpretation of ancient Jewish texts. He studied in Israel and Serbia and earned his doctorate in Biblical Philology, specializing in Old Testament onomastics. He serves as President of the Institute for Hebrew Language and Literature in Belgrade and is the founder, Editor-in-Chief, and Managing Editor of the *European Hebrew Journal*.

His publications include Hebrew–Serbian and Serbian–Hebrew dictionaries, works on the Dead Sea Scrolls, particularly the Isaiah Scroll, and an onomasticon of biblical names. His research interests encompass comparative Semitic linguistics, the historical development of Hebrew, and the linguistic and cultural significance of biblical personal names and place names.

Alongside his research and editorial activities, Stanojević teaches Biblical and Modern Hebrew and contributes to public engagement with biblical scholarship through lectures, interviews, and educational initiatives. He also hosts interviews for the Biblical Studies channel of the New Books Network.

Recent Publications

Onomastikon biblijskih imena. Tom I: Starozavetna imena [*Onomasticon of Biblical Names, Vol. I: Old Testament Names*]. Belgrade: Centar za hebrejski jezik i književnost, 2026.

"The Distribution of Theophoric Elements in a Corpus of 262 Biblical Personal Names: A Quantitative Analysis of Yahwistic, El-Based, Adon, and Shaddai Name Formations," *Social Science Research Network*, 2026. https://ssrn.com/abstract=6939538.

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"Shechem, Gerizim, and Ebal: Sacred Geography, Memory, and Identity in Joshua 8 and 24"

Abstract

This paper examines the geographical and theological significance of Shechem, Mount Gerizim, and Mount Ebal in the Book of Joshua, with particular attention to Joshua 8:30–35 and 24:1–28. Rather than treating geography merely as the physical setting of the biblical narrative, the study approaches the landscape of Shechem as an active element in the construction of Israelite memory and identity. Joshua 8 places the ceremony of blessing and curse between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, while Joshua 24 brings the tribes of Israel together at Shechem for the renewal of the covenant. The paper investigates the relationship between these two episodes and asks how the spatial configuration of the Shechem valley contributes to their theological significance.

Particular attention is given to the geographical relationship between Shechem, Gerizim, and Ebal, as well as to the place of Shechem within the wider landscape of ancient Israel. The study also considers the continuity of this sacred geography in the Samaritan tradition, especially the enduring religious significance of Mount Gerizim. From this perspective, the landscape becomes a medium through which biblical memory is preserved, interpreted, and transmitted across different religious communities. Combining exegetical analysis, historical geography, archaeological evidence, and cartographic reconstruction, the paper proposes a reading of Joshua 8 and 24 in which sacred space plays a significant role in the formation of communal identity and covenantal memory.

Keywords

Shechem, Mount Gerizim, Mount Ebal, Joshua, sacred geography, biblical geography, covenant, Israelite memory, Samaritan tradition.

Biographical Note

Ion Sorin Bora is a Lecturer in Biblical Studies at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Craiova, Romania. He teaches New Testament Studies, Biblical Hebrew Culture and Spirituality, and Biblical Influences in Universal Art. His research interests include biblical exegesis, the geographical and cultural contexts of biblical narratives, Luke–Acts, early Christianity, religious memory, and the relationship between biblical texts and material and cultural heritage.

He has published articles in Romanian and international theological journals and has participated in academic conferences devoted to biblical exegesis and Christian heritage. His recent research has focused particularly on the geographical dimension of biblical narratives and the interpretation of sacred space. His 2025 monograph examines the relationship between apostolic mission, geographical space, and the formation of early Christian communities.

His earlier publications include studies on baptism in the Acts of the Apostles and on Theodore of Mopsuestia as an exegete of the Antiochian tradition. He is also interested in the application of digital and geographical methods to biblical research, particularly in the reconstruction and interpretation of the spatial contexts of biblical narratives.

Recent Publications

Sensul exegetic al apostoliei în cartea Faptele Apostolilor. O analiză a călătoriilor misionare. Craiova: Editura Mitropolia Olteniei, 2025.

"'Ce mă oprește ca să fiu botezat?' (Fapte 8, 36). Condițiile și consecințele primirii Sfântului Botez, din perspectiva cărții Faptele Apostolilor," *Mitropolia Olteniei* 1–4 (2024): 107–22.

"Theodore of Mopsuestia – an Exponential Exegete of the Antiochian School in the Golden Age of Christianity," *Romanian Orthodox Old Testament Studies* 9.1 (2023): 12–23.

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"'Eighty Men from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria': A Note on the Murderous Text of Jeremiah 41"

Abstract

Shechem is one of three significant Israelite towns from which eighty pilgrims travel in mourning to offer grain and incense at the site of Jerusalem's ruined temple. Their journey ends in deception, bloodshed and bribery, and appears to mark the end for one strand of hope in the book of Jeremiah for a reunited people of God, restored in their own land. This note assesses some recent commentary on Jer 41, esp. vv. 1-10 and its implications for a theology of the book of Jeremiah. In essence, the favouring of the (first?) Babylonian deportees over other groups of survivors is highlighted to the extent that even faithful adherents of the LORD in the land are ruthlessly exterminated, and God's promise "to build and to plant" is pushed far into the future (cf. Jer 29; 32) and the implications for the implementation of the "new covenant" (Jer. 31:31-34) are briefly considered.

Keywords

Shechem, pilgrim, mourning, massacre, deportees, the land restoration, Jeremiah 41.

Biographical Note

John Applegate's first degree was in chemistry; he ran a soil chemistry research lab at the University of Reading. Later he trained for ordination at Trinity College, Bristol and began work on what turned into a PhD on Jeremiah.

He has been involved in parish ministry for eighteen years (1984-2002) in inner urban Manchester and Salford, re-planting a church, working extensively on

community regeneration, founding a community-based regeneration agency and researching the Quality of Life of clergy and their families.

From 1997 to 2002 he was Area Dean of Salford, supporting over thirty or so clergy across twenty parishes, chaplaincies and specialist ministries. As archdeacon of Bolton (2002-2008) he oversaw about 120 and was Bishop's Advisor on Healthcare Chaplaincy. As principal of the All Saints Centre for Mission and Ministry (2008- 2021) he carried the overall responsibility for ministerial formation, teaching biblical studies and leading a team of up to ninety-five tutors offering theological courses preparing lay and ordained ministers for the Church of England.

He taught part-time at the University of Manchester over a period of about twenty years mainly on the Old Testament, and on hermeneutics and biblical ethics (approx. 1996-2018) and participates in the University's Ehrhardt Seminar (for biblical studies) since 1986.

Currently he is retired, but he chairs a national organisation which supports ministers of religion and people who work for faith-based organisations and holds the pastoral and liturgical ministry across a parish with two churches – and continues his research.

Recent Publications

"'To Build and to Plant': Hope in Ordinary Things in a Time of Medical, Communal, and Environmental Emergency," in David G. Firth, Jamie A. Grant, and Alison Lo (eds.), *Hope for the World from the Old Testament: Essays in Honour of J. Gordon McConville on His 70th Birthday*, GFS 4, Wilmore, KY: Glossa House, 2025, 57–68.

Preaching Jeremiah: Three Presentations on an Exegetical Approach to Preaching from the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible. Liverpool: Diocese of Liverpool, 2023.

"Narrative Patterns for the Communication of Commissioned Speech in the Prophets: A Three-Scene Model", in George J. Brooke and J.-D. Kaestli (eds.), *Narrativity in Biblical and Related Texts*, BETL 149, Leuven: Peeters, 2000, 69–88.

Day 2: Friday, 13 November 2026

Session 8

Jacob, Joseph, and Israel:
Patriarchal Narratives and the Pedagogy of Divine Revelation

17:00–18:00 | Chair: John Applegate

17:00 – Mihailo Milenković, "The Patriarch Jacob in Jewish and Christian Exegetical Traditions before John Chrysostom"

17:20 – Giuseppe Scollo, "Jacob, Joseph, and Israel in the Gradualness of God's Revelation: A Paradigmatic Example of Pedagogy and Progression in Divine-Human Relationships"

18:00 – Q&A

18:20 – Summary of Conference Day 2

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"The Patriarch Jacob in Jewish and Christian Exegetical Traditions before John Chrysostom"

Abstract

This paper examines the interpretation and theological representation of the patriarch Jacob in the exegetical tradition preceding John Chrysostom, taking Philo of Alexandria as an important point of departure. It traces how Jacob's character, virtues, struggles, and relationship with God were understood in early Jewish and Christian readings of the biblical narrative, with particular attention to the ways in which he came to function as a theological and moral paradigm. Philo's allegorical and philosophical reading of Jacob provides a starting point for examining subsequent developments, especially the relationship between the literal biblical narrative and its ethical, spiritual, and theological significance.

The study then considers selected early Christian authors and exegetical traditions that predate John Chrysostom. Rather than assuming a linear development, it explores different interpretative trajectories shaped by the changing cultural, intellectual, and theological contexts of early Jewish and Christian exegesis. Particular attention is given to the ways in which these contexts influenced the questions posed to the biblical text and the exegetical methods employed in interpreting Jacob. This historical and comparative approach reconstructs the exegetical background inherited by John Chrysostom and clarifies the traditions that preceded his theological presentation of the patriarch.

Keywords

Jacob, Philo of Alexandria, biblical exegesis, patristic exegesis, allegory, virtue, Old Testament, John Chrysostom.

Biographical Note

Mihailo Milenković is a doctoral researcher in Old Testament studies and patristic exegesis at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Belgrade. His doctoral dissertation focuses on the figure of the patriarch Jacob in the Homilies on the Book of Genesis by Saint John Chrysostom, examining Chrysostom's exegetical methods and theological interpretation of the biblical narrative.

He holds a BA in Theology from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Belgrade, and an MA in Classics from the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade (2022). In 2024, he earned a Licentiate in Theology, specializing in Patristic Studies, from the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome (Patristic studies). He also attended a course in Greek palaeography at the Vatican School of Palaeography, Diplomatics, and Archivistics (2023–24).

His broader research interests include early Christian exegesis, the patristic reception of biblical texts, Byzantine theology, and the relationship between biblical interpretation and theological development. His work combines close textual analysis of biblical and patristic sources with historical and theological approaches to the development of Christian exegesis.

Recent Publications

"Markel Ankirski, *O svetoj Crkvi*: prevod i kontekstualizacija u okviru Markelovog bogoslovlja," in Darko Đogo (ed.), *Nikeja – Susret Istoka i Zapada: Zbornik radova sa naučnog skupa održanog 10–12. juna 2025. godine u Foči*, Foča: Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of East Sarajevo, 2026, 179–201.

"The Role of Gnosis in the Interpretation of the Old Testament in the Epistle of Barnabas," *Revista Teologică* 35.2 (2025): 96–105.

"The Lexeme θεραπεία and Its Significance in the Religious History of the Blessed Theodoret of Cyrrhus," *Lucida Intervalla* 52.2 (2023): 151–65.

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"Jacob, Joseph, and Israel in the Gradualness of God's Revelation: A Paradigmatic Example of Pedagogy and Progression in Divine-Human Relationships"

Abstract

This study intends to explore the scriptural and patristic concept of the gradual, developmental nature of divine revelation (*pedagogia divina*) by examining how God shapes human maturity across salvation history. Drawing on St Irenaeus of Lyons' paradigm of God and humanity becoming progressively "accustomed to one another" (*CCC* 53), the paper wishes to demonstrate that the structural trajectory of Genesis (Gen 1–50) serves as a micro-paradigm for both Israel's historical development and contemporary Christian initiation.

Synthesizing canonical narrative analysis (Robert L. Cohn) with patristic theology (*CCC* 53), the study traces a five-stage evolution in divine-human relationships: from primeval "infantile" dependence marked by immediate interventions (Gen 1–11), through Abrahamic guidance (Gen 11–25), Jacob's emerging moral agency (Gen 25–33), and Joseph's wisdom (Gen 33–50), to Israel's envisioned maturity as God's chosen Servant/Worshipper (Heb. '*āvad*). This narrative arc mirrors Israel's macro-historical maturation from the childish grumbling of the wilderness Exodus (Exod 15–17, Num 11) to the more complex existential questions of the Exile (Job, Qohelet, Habakkuk), culminating in the mature vocation of Israel as the *Suffering Servant* (Isa 49:3) and the *full stature of Christ* (Eph 4:13).

Finally, the paper draws on St. Augustine, Origen, and Joseph Ratzinger to argue that this developmental hermeneutic necessitates a pre- or post-baptismal catechumenate. By aligning personal spiritual formation with the pedagogical

progression of Sacred Scripture, believers can move from basic faith to mature, adult intimacy with the Word.

Keywords

Jacob, Joseph, Israel, Divine-Human Relationships, Pedagogy, Progression, Revelation.

Biographical Note

Fr. Giuseppe Scollo was ordained to the priesthood for the archdiocese of Toronto in 2007, and completed his graduate degrees in theology at the Gregorian University in 2018. His doctoral thesis was published as *The Strength Needed to Enter the Kingdom of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Luke 16,16 in Context*, WUNT II/485, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019.

He is a fulltime Assistant Professor of Biblical Theology at St. Augustine's Seminary, and teaches widely in the area of Biblical Studies. Previous positions include associate pastor of St. Marguerite d'Youville Parish (Brampton), from 2007-2008; vice-rector of the Redemptoris Mater Missionary Seminary (Toronto), from 2018-2021, and pastor of St. Clare's Parish (Toronto), from 2021-2023. Fr. Scollo is actively involved in ongoing research, catechetical instruction, youth ministry, parish assistance, Lenten missions and Advent retreats.

Recent Publications

"Joseph Ratzinger, Dei Verbum, and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture 'Sub Lumine Fidei'," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 29.1 (2026): 32–71.

"The Lion/Lamb of God and the Messiah ben Joseph/ben David: The Impact of the Living and Dynamic Tradition of the Church on the Interpretation of the Word of God," *Teologia* 99.2 (2024): 266–300.

Day 3: Saturday, 14 November 2026

Session 9

Joseph, Shechem, and the Memory of Israel in Biblical Traditions

09:00–11:00 | Chair: Capodistrias Hämmerli (University of Fribourg)

09:00 – Meira Polliack, "Joseph Enfolding Hagar: Analogous Aspects of Nested Characters and Their Reception in Exegesis"

09:40 – Iosif Stancovici, "From Shechem to Dothan: The Anonymous Man and the Narrative Geography of Joseph's Journey (Genesis 37:12–17)"

10:00 – Luka G. Lukić, "Joseph, Shechem, and the Memory of Israel in Stephen's Speech: Acts 7:9–16"

10:20 – Q&A

10:40 – Short break

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"Joseph Enfolding Hagar: Analogous Aspects of Nested Characters and their Reception Exegesis"

Abstract

I derive the term "nested characters" from the better-known term "nested fiction". It refers to the literary device of a "story within a story" or "play within a play", as when a narrator creates a character who writes/tells his or her own story or play (e.g., Shakespeare's Hamlet or the character of Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy). The "personality profiles" of Hagar (including the secondary figure of her son, Ishmael, in Gen 16; 21:8–21) and Joseph (Gen 37-50) share some striking motifs. These include the Egyptian backgrounding of their stories; their adopted identities and unwavering forms of behavior that trigger animosity towards them; they are both cast-outs, relatively young, and more. In addition, lexical and wider semantic frames underpin their common characterization, such as losing their way (תעה); being cast to their fate (השליך), being close to death in open country without water yet in the vicinity of a well (בור/באר). Despite such common motifs, the analogical characterization of Hagar and Joseph generally eludes Bible exegetes. In my talk, I will explore the functions of Joseph's nested characterization in relation to Hagar, and its possible implications for the reception history of his character. Touching upon the theme of family rejection/abjection and trauma, whether by their nuclear as well as non-nuclear/adoptive families, and the theme of divine revelation, I will also discuss how the nested character narrative mechanism further unfolds in reception exegesis of Joseph and Hagar.

Keywords

Narrative, nested character; cast-out, trauma, Joseph, Hagar, loss, well.

Biographical Note

Meira Polliack is Professor of Bible at Tel Aviv University, where she has been teaching biblical literature, Medieval Bible exegesis and reception history since 1996. She also holds the Joseph and Ceil Mazer Chair in Jewish Culture in Muslim Lands and Cairo Geniza Studies at TAU. She specialized in Jewish Arabic Bible translations during her graduate and post-graduate years at Cambridge University (1988-1995). She has served as principal investigator in several research projects, such as "The Discovery of Biblical Narrative in Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Exegesis (10th to 12th Centuries), (ISF 2010 - 2013); "Biblia Arabica - The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims) https://www.biblia-arabica.com,(DFG-DIP 2012-2018) and "The Davidic Narratives and David's Portrayal (The Books of Samuel and Psalms) in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Translation and Exegesis, A Comparative Religious Approach", (ISF 2017 – 2021).

She has published widely on biblical reception history and exegesis, Bible as literature, Bible and trauma studies, medieval Arabic Bible translation and exegesis in the Islamic milieu, Judeo-Arabic literature, Karaite Judaisn, and the Cairo Geniza (for her publications see https://cris.tau.ac.il/en/persons/meira-polliack ; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8538-1492.

Polliack's current research focuses on reception exegesis of biblical characters (such as Hagar, Esther, David), and on characterization techniques and character development in the Hebrew Bible in light of biblical ethics and hermeneutics.

Recent Publications (selection)

"The Value(s) of Flawed Protagonists: Premodern Viewpoints on Biblical Narrative as Paideia," in G. Gelardini, K. S. Fuglseth, and P. J. Bekken (eds.), *Virtus et Humanitas: Bridging Virtues and Values of Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian Paideia* (Religious Diversity and Education in Europe 48), Münster, Waxmann Verlag, 2026, 245–72.

"What Goes Up: Tracing Vertical Directionality in Esther and its Reception Exegesis," *Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute* 50 (2026): 111–61.

With A. Zoref and O. Mizrachi, "'Are You the One to Build Me a House?': Interreligious Aspects of Medieval Jewish, Christian and Islamic Exegesis on David's Role in Building the Temple," in Y. Friedman and C. Markschies (eds.),

Religious Polemics in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2025, 37–77.

"Arabic Bible Versions in the High Middle Ages and Their Relevance to Biblical Studies," in G. Macaskill, C.M. Maier, and J. Schaper (eds.), *Congress Volume Aberdeen 2019*, Vetus Testamentum Supplements 192, Leiden: Brill, 2022, 291–314.

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Fr. IOSIF STANCOVICI, PhD

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"From Shechem to Dothan: The Anonymous Man and the Narrative Geography of Joseph's Journey (Genesis 37:12–17)"

Abstract

In Genesis 37:12–17, the journey of Joseph from the valley of Hebron to Shechem and further to Dothan introduces a brief but significant encounter with an otherwise unidentified man. When Joseph loses his way while searching for his brothers, this unnamed figure finds him, asks what he is looking for, and directs him towards Dothan. Although the episode occupies only a few verses, it plays a decisive role in the development of the Joseph narrative: the encounter enables Joseph to continue his journey and ultimately brings him into the circumstances that lead to his being sold into slavery in Egypt.

This paper examines the literary and theological significance of the anonymous man, with particular attention to the narrative geography of Joseph's journey. Rather than concentrating exclusively on the question of the man's identity, it explores the

function of his anonymity and the importance of Shechem as a transitional setting in the narrative. Joseph's presence in Shechem, a place already associated with the patriarchal history of Israel and with complex memories of kinship, conflict, and territorial belonging, provides a meaningful geographical and literary background for the events that follow. The movement from Shechem to Dothan thus marks more than a change of location: it constitutes a turning point in the narrative, where an apparently incidental encounter becomes an instrument in the unfolding of divine providence.

By considering the relationship between place, character, and narrative development, the paper seeks to show how this short episode contributes to the theological interpretation of the Joseph story and to the broader significance of Shechem within the patriarchal traditions of Genesis.

Key words

Shechem, Joseph, Genesis 37, anonymous man, narrative geography, divine providence, patriarchal traditions.

Biographical Note

Fr. Dr. Iosif Stancovici is a Serbian Orthodox priest, biblical scholar, and Associate Lecturer in Biblical Studies at St. Andrei Șaguna Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, and at the Faculty of Letters, History, Philosophy and Theology, West University of Timișoara, Romania. He earned his doctoral degree in Theology in 2015 from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Andrei Șaguna" at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. His doctoral dissertation, entitled *The Family in the Light of the Book of Genesis: The Formation and Education of the Younger Generation – A Response to the Challenges of the Contemporary World*, examines the biblical foundations of family life and education.

He completed his theological and classical philological studies at the West University of Timișoara, specializing in Orthodox Theology and Classical Philology (Greek and Latin). In 2010–2011, he pursued biblical studies at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem and attended modern Hebrew language courses at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

His academic and teaching activities include Biblical Archaeology, Old Testament Studies, Biblical Hebrew, Church Slavonic, and Religious Studies. Since 2020, together with Fr. Prof. Ioan Mihoc, he has organized the annual International Symposium on Biblical Exegesis in Timișoara.

His research interests include the patriarchal narratives of Genesis, biblical family traditions, the reception of Old Testament figures in early Christian literature, and the relationship between biblical exegesis and patristic interpretation. He has published studies on Abraham, Jacob, Rachel, Joseph, Tobit, and the literary structure of Genesis.

Recent Publications

"Jacob and the Twelve Tribes in Sirach 44:23: Blessing, Inheritance, and the Priesthood in Israel's Identity," *Revista Teologică* / *Theological Review* 107.2 (2025): 27–43.

"The Teachings of Tobit to His Son Tobias," *Romanian Orthodox Old Testament Studies* 11. 1 (2024): 135–155.

"'Nu puteau să-i vorbească în pace': Facere 37: 2–11 în literatura creştină primară" ["'They Could Not Speak Peaceably to Him': Genesis 37:2–11 in Early Christian Literature"], in Ioan Mihoc and Iosif Stancovici (eds.), *Fides quae per caritatem operatur: Studii biblice*, Iaşi: Editura Doxologia, 2023, 397–412.

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"Joseph, Shechem, and the Memory of Israel in Stephen's Speech: Acts 7:9–16"

Abstract

This paper examines Acts 7:9–16 as New Testament reception of Joseph traditions and Shechem memory. Although the Joseph episode has often been treated as a brief historical summary within Stephen's larger defense, this study argues that it performs an important theological and rhetorical function. In Luke's presentation, Joseph appears as the rejected brother who, through divine providence, becomes the means of preservation and salvation for those who had rejected him. This pattern anticipates the subsequent portrayal of Moses and prepares Stephen's final accusation concerning the rejection of the "Righteous One."

Special attention will be given to Acts 7:16, where Shechem appears as the burial place of the patriarchs. Rather than reducing this verse to the issue of historical harmonization with Genesis and Joshua, the paper approaches Shechem as a site of Israelite memory. In Stephen's speech, Shechem evokes the intertwined traditions of Jacob, Joseph, the patriarchs, land, burial, and covenantal identity. The reference therefore contributes to the broader argument of Acts 7: God's saving activity cannot be confined to a single sacred space, institution, or period of Israel's history.

By reading Acts 7:9–16 in dialogue with Genesis, Joshua, Second Temple Jewish traditions, and the narrative logic of Acts, this paper demonstrates how Stephen's speech reconfigures Israel's memory around rejection, divine presence, and salvation. Shechem thus emerges not merely as a geographical detail, but as a theological marker of continuity and transformation within the history of Israel.

Keywords

Biblical Studies, Acts of the Apostles, Stephen's Speech, Joseph, Shechem, Israelite Identity, Old Testament interpretation in the New Testament.

Biographical Note

Luka G. Lukić is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Belgrade, Serbia. He completed his MA in Biblical Studies with a focus on the New Testament. His main areas of research include Sacred Scripture, New Testament exegesis, the patristic interpretation of biblical texts, and the history of Serbian biblical scholarship.

His doctoral research focuses on the history and development of Serbian biblical scholarship, with particular attention to the interpretation and reception of the New Testament in theological, hermeneutical, and ecclesiastical contexts.

Recent Publications

"Прворођени прије сваке твари или преузвишени (створени) Син? Однос Павловог теолошког контекста и аријанске егзегезе термина πρωτότοκος (Кол 1, 15, 18; Рим 8, 29)," Дарко Ђого (ed.), *Никеја — Сусрет Истока и Запада: Зборник радова са научног скупа одржаног 10–12. јуна 2025. године у Фочи*, Фоча: Универзитет у Источном Сарајеву, 2026, 21–50.

"[Review of] Michael F. Bird, *Jesus among the Gods: Early Christology in the Greco-Roman World*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2022, 480 pp," *Теолошки погледи* 57.2 (2024): 285–88.

"[Review of] Vladan Tatalović, *By Every Word: Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives on the Orthodox New Testament Scholarship in Serbia*. Belgrade: Biblical Institute, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Belgrade, 2024, 175 pp," *Богословље* 84.2 (2025): 128–30.

Day 3: Saturday, 14 November 2026

Session 10

Community Boundaries, Archaeology, and the Visual Memory of Biblical Places

11:00–12:20 | Chair: Marian Vild

11:00 – Alexandru Mihăilă, "Friends and Adversaries in the Book of Ezra: Defining Community Boundaries in the Persian Province of Yehud"

11:20 – Aleksandar Danilović, "From the Shephelah to Scripture: Archaeological Discoveries from Tel Azekah"

11:40 – Linda Saskia Menczel, "Shechem in Visual Art: A Journey Within"

12:00 – Q&A

12:20 – Lunch break

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"Friends and Adversaries in the Book of Ezra: Defining Community Boundaries in the Persian Province of Yehud"

Abstract

This paper examines the negotiation of community boundaries in the book of Ezra, taking Ezra 4:1-5 as its point of departure. The passage presents a tension: people who claim to worship the same God as the returnees offer to participate in rebuilding the Jerusalem temple, yet the narrator introduces them as the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin. Their subsequent exclusion raises questions about the relationship between shared religious practices and recognized communal membership. The study approaches Yehud through community identity rather than modern categories of nationhood or assumptions of fixed ethnicity. Identity is understood as relational, historically contingent, and negotiated among overlapping communities claiming continuity with Israel. Accordingly, the expression "people of the land" is examined as a contextual designation within a contested social landscape, rather than treated as an unambiguous ethnic classification. Combining narrative analysis with attention to the Persian imperial setting, the paper investigates how the returnees authorize their exclusive participation through appeals to Cyrus, communal leadership, and the memory of displacement. The narrator's anticipatory designation of the applicants as adversaries frames their offer before hostile actions are reported. This narrative strategy legitimizes exclusion while inviting examination of how boundary maintenance and conflict reinforce one another. Comparison with Ezra 6:21 and chapters 9-10 explores the tension between conditional incorporation and separation. Persian royal support demonstrates that outsiders can facilitate restoration,

complicating any straightforward opposition between ethnic insiders and foreign enemies.

Keywords

Yehud, Book of Ezra, Post-Exilic Community, Persian Period, Community Identity, Social Boundaries.

Biographical Note

Alexandru Mihăilă is Associate Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Hebrew at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Bucharest, Romania. He earned his doctorate in Orthodox Theology, specializing in Old Testament studies, from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași in 2007. His research interests include the history and religion of ancient Israel, community identity in the Hebrew Bible, biblical interpretation, and the reception of Scripture in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. He has explored the relationship between the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text, the formation and negotiation of communal boundaries, and the interaction between historical-critical scholarship and traditional exegesis. He co-authored a dictionary and an introductory grammar of Biblical Hebrew with Cristinel Iatan. Mihăilă has been involved in several translation projects: a Romanian translation of the Hebrew Bible, a translation of the Sahidic Coptic sayings of the Desert Fathers and of Basil of Caesarea's *Commentary on Isaiah* with introduction and notes.

Recent publications

"Perspectives on the History and Theology of the Prophetologion," in Stefanos Alexopoulos, Stig Simeon R. Frøyshov, Stefan Royé, and Andrew Wade (eds.), *Byzantine Liturgical Books: An Introduction*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2025, 167–191.

"Quoting Scripture against the Jews during the Holy Week in the Eastern Orthodox Church," Alexandru Ioniță and Stefan Tobler (eds.), *Orthodox Liturgy and Anti-Judaism*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2024, 41–50.

"A Circumcised Heart: The Anthropological Function of the Heart as the Inner Man," in Cosmin Pricop, Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, and Tobias Nicklas (eds.), *Images of Human Being*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024, 1–17.

"The Old Greek, Hebrew, and Other Text Witnesses in Eastern Orthodoxy," in Eugen J. Pentiuc (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Orthodox Christianity*, Oxford: University Press, 2022, 36–51.

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"From the Shephelah to Scripture: Archaeological Discoveries from Tel Azekah"

Abstract

Tel Azekah is one of the most important archaeological sites of the Judean Shephelah, situated at a strategic point between the coastal plain and the hill country of Judah. Known from several biblical and extra-biblical traditions, including the narratives of Joshua, Samuel, and the Lachish Letters, Azekah offers a valuable case study for the relationship between biblical memory, historical reconstruction, and archaeological discovery.

This short presentation will present selected results from the recent excavations at Tel Azekah, with particular attention to their relevance for biblical exegesis. The focus will be placed on the site's geographical importance, its settlement history, and several key discoveries that illuminate the cultural, political, and religious world of the southern Levant. Special consideration will be given to the relationship between archaeological evidence and biblical texts: not in the sense of a simple "confirmation" of Scripture, but as a dialogue between material culture and literary tradition.

The presentation will also include a brief personal perspective on the excavation process and on the methodological challenges of connecting archaeological finds with biblical interpretation. The aim is to show how Tel Azekah can serve as a fruitful example of interdisciplinary work between archaeology, history, and Old Testament studies.

Keywords

Tel Azekah, Biblical Archaeology, Old Testament, Shephelah, Judah, Lachish Letters, Material Culture, Biblical Exegesis.

Biographical Note

Aleksandar Danilović is an Orthodox theologian and Research Assistant in Old Testament at the Theological Faculty of Ruprecht-Karls-Universität in Heidelberg. He completed his PhD in July 2026 with a doctoral dissertation, entitled "The Golden Bridge: The Second Book of Maccabees, Its Theology and Its Status in the Biblical Canon". It focused on 2 Maccabees, canon formation, theology, and the reception of deuterocanonical literature. His broader research interests include the Old Testament, Septuagint studies, biblical archaeology, patristic exegesis, and digital humanities. He participated multiple times in the archaeological excavations of the Lautenschläger Azekah Expedition, a cooperation between the Universities of Heidelberg and Tel Aviv. His publications are connected with Tel Azekah, biblical archaeology, and the interpretation of biblical texts in light of material culture.

Recent Publications

"On the Eve of War: The Jerusalem Gymnasium (2 Macc. 4:7–15)," *Welt des Orients* 54 (2026), forthcoming.

"'Your Dead Shall Live…' (Isa. 26:19): Old Testament Witnesses to the Belief in the Resurrection of the Dead," *Bogoslovlje* 85.1 (2026): 57–77 (in Serbian).

"'And the Lord Threw Large Stones on Them from Heaven' (Josh. 10:11): Archaeological Excavations at Tel Azekah from the Perspective of the Biblical Text," *Bogoslovlje* 82.1 (2023): 103–23 (in Serbian).

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"Shechem in Visual Art – A Journey Within"

Abstract

Shechem in Visual Art – A Journey Within explores the visual afterlife of one of the Bible's most symbolically charged places. Situated between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, Shechem is not only a geographical site, but a spiritual threshold: a place of promise, violence, covenant, memory, political fracture, and divine encounter. This paper follows the transformation of Shechem across biblical art, from Abraham's first altar at the oak of Moreh and Jacob's settlement, to the troubling story of Dinah and Shechem, Joseph's betrayal and burial, Joshua's covenant renewal, Abimelech's violent kingship, Rehoboam's failed listening, and the Christian tradition of Christ and the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well.

Rather than treating these images as isolated biblical illustrations, the paper reads them as stages in an inner journey. Shechem becomes a visual and theological landscape in which humanity is repeatedly called to choose: between blessing and curse, violence and covenant, possession and promise, memory and transformation. The relative absence of major images of Joshua's covenant renewal is also significant, suggesting that some of Shechem's deepest meanings resist direct representation. Ultimately, the paper proposes an "inner Shechem": a symbolic meeting place within the human person, where history, wound, conscience, and divine presence converge.

Keywords

Visual art, painting, etching, Nablous, Sichar, Shechem.

Biographical Note

Linda-Saskia Menczel studied at the Johannesburg Art, Ballet, Drama and Music School in South Africa until 1989, when she returned to Romania. She completed her studies in Fine Arts at the West University of Timișoara in 1998. Later she returned to university to undertake PhD research on the use of (pseudo-)Hebrew inscriptions in Christian art, which she completed in 2023.

She has been a member of the Romanian Union of Fine Artists since 1999 and a founding member of the "Dor" artists' group since 2001. She has received several awards for excellence in fine arts over an artistic career which includes nineteen solo exhibitions and more than twenty monumental sculptures installed in various Romanian cities. Her work explores the relationship between artistic expression, spirituality, cultural identity, and biblical themes. In addition to her work as a sculptor, she currently teaches visual arts at an Orthodox High School in Timișoara.

Recent Publications

From Letter to The Word: Hebrew Inscriptions in European Art with a Christian Theme. Timișoara: West University Publishing, 2023.

"Hebrew Inscriptions in Christian-Themed European Art," in Ioan Mihoc and Iosif Stancovici (eds.), *Fides quae per caritatem operatur: Biblical Studies*, Iași: Doxologia, 2023, 172–97.

Day 3: Saturday, 14 November 2026

Session 11

Jacob, Samaritan Worship, and the Reception of John 4 in Jewish and Christian Traditions

15:00–17:00 | Chair: Srećko Koralija

15:20 – George-Antoniu Nicoară, "'The Father Seeks True Worshippers': John 4:19–24 in the Context of Shechem"

15:40 – Ioan Mihoc, "The Samaritans' Journey to Faith: Ethical and Narrative Analysis of John 4:31–42"

15:40 – Marian Vild, "The Samaritan Woman in Patristic Perspective: Gender, Mission, and Theological Symbolism in John 4 and the Early Church"

16:00 – Kees den Biesen, "At Jacob's Well: Ephrem the Syrian's Surprising View on the Encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman"

16:20 – Q&A

16:40 – Short break

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"'The Father Seeks True Worshippers': John 4:19–24 in the Context of Shechem"

Abstract

This study examines the identity of the "true worshippers" and the presentation of true worship in the Gospel of John, focusing on John 4:19–24 within the context of Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman. Particular attention is given to the Father's seeking of such worshippers and to the meaning of the expression ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ.

The woman's question concerning the proper place of worship (John 4:20) reflects the dispute between Samaritans and Jews over Mount Gerizim and the Jerusalem Temple, their respective cultic centres. Old Testament traditions associated with Shechem and Mount Gerizim (Gen 12:6–7; 33:18–20; Deut 11:29; Josh 24:14–25) provide the biblical background for examining how Jesus' response shifts the emphasis from the place of worship to the worshippers themselves and the manner in which they worship the Father.

The study explores how John 4:23–24 defines the "true worshippers," how they are constituted as such, and what the Father's seeking of them entails (ὁ πατὴρ τοιούτους ζητεῖ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας αὐτόν). Particular consideration is given to the significance of πνεῦμα and ἀλήθεια within Johannine theology. These elements are further examined in relation to the incarnate Word and the revelation of the Father through the Son (John 1:14, 18), Christ's body as the temple (John 2:19–21), the work of the Spirit (John 3:5–8; 7:37–39), and the relationship between Christ as the Truth and the Spirit of Truth (John 14:6, 17; 15:26; 16:13). The study argues that the worshippers

sought by the Father are defined by their relationship with Him and by their worship in spirit and truth, offered to the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

Keywords

True worshippers, ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ, John 4:19–24, Johannine theology, the Father's seeking of worshippers, place of worship, Samaritans, Shechem, Mount Gerizim.

Biographical Note

George-Antoniu Nicoară is a doctoral researcher at the "Isidor Todoran" Doctoral School of Theology, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, under the supervision of Fr. Professor Stelian Tofană (since 2026). He also teaches religion at a secondary school in Timișoara.

He holds a bachelor's degree in Orthodox Pastoral Theology (2022) and a master's degree in Orthodox Theology and Christian Mission (2024), both from the West University of Timișoara. His research interests focus particularly on New Testament exegesis, Johannine theology, biblical Christology, and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

Recent Publications

"2 Timothy 2:2 and the Teaching Ministry of the Church: Preserving, Entrusting, and Proclaiming the Gospel," in *"The Faithful Word as He Has Been Taught" (Titus 1:9): Apostolic Kerygma and Piety in Pastoral Ministry*, Ioan Mihoc (ed.), forthcoming, 2026.

"'Ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν' (Matthew 5:44): The Commandment of Perfection as the Defining Mark of the Christian Ethos", in the forthcoming proceedings of the 5th International Symposium on Biblical Exegesis, 2025.

"The Biblical Patriarchs and Pre-Mosaic Priesthood," *Theologos* new series, 4 (31) (2025): 137–153.

"Models of Prayer in the Gospel Texts" *Theologos* new series 3 (30) (2024): 119–136.

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"The Samaritans' Journey to Faith: Ethical and Narrative Analysis of John 4:31–42"

Abstract

This paper revisits John 4:31–42 with an ethical and narrative lens, asking a question that has received surprisingly little attention: what is the moral value of mediated faith? Scholars have long noted the movement from the Samaritan woman's testimony to the townspeople's direct encounter with Jesus, and many have contrasted her openness with Nicodemus' hesitation. Yet the intermediate stage itself—the imperfect, questioning witness that enables the later confession—has rarely been treated as ethically significant. The narrative does not present the woman's words ("Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?") as a weakness. Rather, her provisional confession opens a communal space in which others move from second-hand belief to personal knowledge: "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves." The disciples' conversation about food (vv. 31–38) functions as a narrative contrast, revealing the cost of remaining stuck in misunderstanding while the harvest is already underway. Read this way, the Samaritans' journey becomes a model of shared moral progress. Mediated testimony is not merely temporary, but a necessary and virtuous stage toward mature faith. The study thus suggests that John 4:31–42 portrays spiritual growth as a communal, progressive, and deeply ethical process rather than a purely individual cognitive achievement.

Keywords

Gospel of John, Samaritan woman, mediated faith, narrative ethics, moral progress, discipleship, testimony, John 4:31–42.

Biographical Note

Fr. Ioan Mihoc has been a lecturer at the Faculty of Letters, History and Theology of the West University of Timișoara since 2021, having taught there since 2017. He teaches New Testament Studies, Principles and Methods of Biblical Interpretation, and New Testament Theology. He completed his theological studies at the "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu. In 2006 he obtained his PhD from the same university, with a dissertation on the Sermon on the Mount. He has published studies in New Testament exegesis and theology in conference volumes and theological journals. He is one of the organizers of the International Symposium on Biblical Exegesis (ISBE, Timișoara), which has reached its fifth edition.

Recent Publications

Editor of *The Faithful Word of Teaching" (Titus 1:9): Apostolic Kerygma and Piety in Pastoral Ministry*. Conference volume. Timișoara: West University of Timișoara Press, forthcoming.

Editor, with introductory study, of Fr. Professor Grigorie T. Marcu, *Saul of Tarsus*. Sibiu: Andreiana Publishing House, 2026.

Co-editor of *Papers Presented at the 3rd International Symposium on Biblical Exegesis*, held in Timișoara, Romania, 10–12 November 2022. Published in *Teologia* 99.2, 2024.

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"The Samaritan Woman in Patristic Perspective: Gender, Mission, and Theological Symbolism in John 4 and the Early Church"

Abstract

This paper examines the figure of the Samaritan woman in John 4 through the lens of patristic exegesis, exploring how early Christian writers interpreted her gender, missionary role and rich theological symbolism. After a brief analysis of the Johannine narrative, the study considers key patristic authors - such as Origen, John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria - and highlights how they read the Samaritan woman as a concrete historical figure, a symbol of the Church, and a prophetic sign of the inclusion of the nations. Particular attention is paid to how the Fathers address issues of gender: the woman is depicted as both weak and surprisingly apostolic, becoming a model of conversion, witness, and theological receptivity. Additionally, the paper explores sacramental and ecclesiological motifs in patristic interpretations, such as the symbolism of living water representing baptism and the Spirit, the 'five husbands' representing Israel's idolatry or the senses, and the journey from the well to the city symbolising the Church's outward mission. Situating these readings within their historical and theological contexts, the paper argues that patristic interpretations of the Samaritan woman provide a nuanced, multilevel vision integrating gender, mission and symbolic theology. These interpretations remain a valuable resource for contemporary biblical and theological reflection.

Key words

Samaritan woman, John 4, patristic exegesis, gender, mission, theological symbolism, Origen, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria.

Biographical Note

Fr. Marian Vild is Head of Department of Historical, Biblical, and Philological Theology within the "Justinian the Patriarch" Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Bucharest. A graduate of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Sibiu, he specialized in biblical theology at the same faculty (MA 2000, PhD 2010). University Assistant (2007–2011), then Lecturer (2011–2021) and Associate Professor (2021–present) at the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest, Father Marian Vild also served as vice-dean of this institution from 2016 to 2019. He had a postdoctoral research fellowship at the Romanian Academy in Iaşi in 2014-2015 entitled "The Role and Place of Holy Scripture in the Thought and Writings of the Hesychast Renewal Movement in the Romanian Principalities in the 18th Century". Since January 2020 he has been principal editor of the Journal *Studii Teologice*. His research focuses on the Pauline Epistles, biblical hermeneutics, and the connection between Bible and spirituality in Eastern Christianity.

Recent Publication

Căsătoria și familia în Epistolele Sfântului Apostol Pavel [Marriage and Family in the Epistles of Saint Apostle Paul]. Bucharest: University Press, 2021.

"Permanent and Specific Reference to Holy Scripture in Hesychastic Spirituality. Case Study: The Epistle of St. Gregory Palamas to the Elder Arsenius the Studite," *Studii Teologice* 21.4 (2025): 77–91.

"Principles of Interpreting the Holy Scripture in the Work of Saint Maximus the Confessor – Introductory Landmarks," *Theological Horizons* 2 (2025): 22–49.

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"At Jacob's Well: Ephrem the Syrian's Surprising View on the Encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman"

Abstract

In *Madraše on Virginity* 22 e 23, Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 300-373) proposes an interpretation of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well that is both innovative and provocative, as the church father realizes. His specific exegesis of this chapter of the Gospel according to John demonstrates Ephrem's great sensitivity with respect to the interpersonal dynamics of a true encounter and dialogue. Moreover, it fits well into his overall endeavor of freeing Christian women from the constraints of cultural patterns and social preconceptions that he considered incompatible with the Christian faith. Ephrem considers the profound respect for the Samaritan woman that Jesus shows in his words and gestures to be a mirror in which the Church should carefully reconsider its attitude towards women and marriage.

Key words

Jacob's Well, Samaritan woman, women's dignity, marriage.

Biographical Note

Kees den Biesen is a scholar in Christian literature, philosophy and theology, specialized in patristic theology. His main interest is in the poetry and symbolic thought of Syriac Christianity and in the languages and spiritualities of the Christian Orient in general. He is professor at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, where gives courses on Syriac exegesis, symbolical theology, liturgy, and spirituality.

Recent Publications

Tiziana Proietti and Kees den Biesen, *Hans van der Laan's Instruments of Thought: Proportion, Architecture, Analogy*. London and New York: Routledge, 2025.

Kees den Biesen, "Giacomo di Sarug medita su l'Adamo-Cristo," in Giovanni Giambalvo Dal Ben (ed.), *Mistici siriaci. Un viaggio nella spiritualità dal IV all'VIII secolo*, Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo, 2026.

Day 3: Saturday, 14 November 2026

Session 12

Joseph in Jewish and Christian Literary and Liturgical Traditions

17:00–18:30 | Chair: Ljubica Jovanović

17:00 – Fotios Apostolos, "The Influence of Jewish Synagogical Worship on the Formation of the Early Christian Offices of Vespers and Matins"

17:20 – Yaroslav Panfilov, "The Image of Joseph in Ethiopian Christian Literature"

17:40 – Srećko Koralija, "From Shechem to Holy Monday: Joseph's Biblical Traditions and Their Reception in the Synaxarion"

18:00 – Q&A

18:20 – Summary of Conference Day 3

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"The Influence of Jewish Synagogical Worship on the Formation of the Early Christian Offices of Vespers and Matins"

Abstract

The formation of early Christian worship is a complex historical and theological phenomenon that cannot be understood independently of the Jewish religious environment in which the early Church emerged and developed. Of particular importance for the evolution of the daily offices of Vespers and Matins was the synagogue tradition of prayer, psalmody, and the reading of Scripture, together with the established times of prayer and the legacy of worship in the Temple of Jerusalem. This paper examines the elements of continuity and transformation as it compares Jewish synagogue worship and early Christian prayer. Particular emphasis is placed on the appointed hours of prayer, the use of the Psalter, the reading of Scripture, the structure of communal gatherings, and the theological interpretation of time. It also considers the gradual process by which Christian worship became distinct from the synagogue setting. It develops the argument that the relationship between the two traditions should not be understood merely in terms of borrowing, but rather as a process of creative reception, reinterpretation, and Christological transformation.

Keywords

Synagogue, early Christian worship, Vespers, Matins, Psalter, hours of prayer, Temple of Jerusalem, Old Testament, Christology, liturgical tradition.

Biographical Note

Apostolos Fotios graduated from the School of Theology of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in 1999 and obtained his Master's degree from the same institution in 2010, with a thesis entitled *Liturgical Differences between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches*. In 2015, he received his doctorate from the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, specializing in the History and Theology of Orthodox Worship. His doctoral dissertation, *The Acolouthy of the Foot Washing in the Greek Orthodox Tradition*, examined the historical and theological dimensions of this liturgical practice. In 2018, he completed postdoctoral research at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki on *The Consequences of the Fall of 1204 on the Liturgical Life and Practice of Constantinople*.

He has published scholarly studies and articles in academic journals and contributed to newspapers and periodicals. He has also participated in radio programs of the Church of Greece, addressing topics related to Divine Worship, Orthodox Tradition, and Liturgical Theology. Since 2021 he serves as Assistant Professor at the Department of Theology, at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, specializing in the History and Theology of Divine Worship.

Recent Publications

Liturgical Differences Between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches After the Decisions of the Second Vatican Council (Condensed Edition), Thessaloniki: Barbounakis, 2024.

"Sources of Ecclesiastical Rhetorical Discourse in the Corpus Canonum of the Sacred Pedalion," *Sinochi* 3 (2024): 34–57.

"New Technologies, the Digital World and Divine Worship: From Necessity to Abuse," *Sinochi* 2.2 (2023), 108–28.

"The Call for Liturgical Renewal and the Contribution of the School of Theology of Athens to Liturgical Studies (1837–2023)," *Yearbook of the School of Theology of Athens* 52 (2023): 315–27.

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"The Image of Joseph in Ethiopian Christian Literature"

Abstract

This study examines the image of the Old Testament patriarch Joseph in the Ethiopian Christian literary tradition, with particular attention to the typological association between Joseph and Jesus Christ. The research focuses on two major original Ethiopian compositions: the *Glory of the Kings* (*Kəbra Nagaśt*; ክብረ ነገሥት) and the *Book of the Mysteries of Heaven and Earth* (*Maṣḥafa Məśṭira Samāy wa-Mədr*; መጽሐፈ ምሥጢረ ሰማይ ወምድር).

The analysis demonstrates that the portrayal of Joseph as a prefiguration of Christ is a well-developed motif in Ethiopian Christian literature. In the *Glory of the Kings*, Joseph is compared to Jesus Christ through a series of parallel elements, including betrayal by his brothers, salvation from famine, and deliverance from Sheol. In the *Book of the Mysteries of Heaven and Earth*, the same typological pattern appears within a systematic series of symbolic correspondences between Old Testament figures and Christ, employing numerical symbolism and gematria.

This study addresses the issue of the origins of this typological tradition. It argues that the rhetorical structure of the comparisons and the sequence of biblical figures (Joseph, Moses, and Joshua) closely resemble the pattern found in the 21st Demonstration of Aphrahat, a fourth-century Syriac Christian writer. This resemblance suggests that the Ethiopian typological tradition may have been mediated through Syriac sources. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of the reception of biblical figures in non-Western Christian traditions and the interaction between Syriac and Ethiopian Christian cultures.

Keywords

Joseph, Ethiopian Christianity, *Glory of the Kings*, *Book of the Mysteries of Heaven and Earth*, Aphrahat, Syriac Christianity, Christological Typology, Ge'ez Literature.

Biographical Note

Yaroslav Panfilov's academic interests focus on early martyr narratives, the history of early Christianity, and Ethiopian Christian literature. He holds a degree in Classical Philology and is currently enrolled in a programme in Ethiopian Studies, where he studies Ge'ez, Amharic, Biblical Hebrew, and other Near Eastern languages. His research explores the literary and theological reception of biblical traditions in Eastern Christian cultures, with particular attention to the transmission of Syriac Christian motifs into Ethiopian literature and the development of Christological interpretations of Old Testament figures.

Recent Publications

"Proconsular Act and Martyrdom: Reconsidering the Editorial Redaction of the Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs," *Studia Religiosa Rossica: Russian Journal of Religion* 2 (2027). (forthcoming)

"Joseph as a Type of Christ: Syriac Origins of the Image of Joseph in Ethiopian Christian Literature," *St. Tikhon's University Review: Theology, Philosophy, Religious Studies* 3. (forthcoming)

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"From Shechem to Holy Monday: Joseph's Biblical Traditions and Their Reception in the Synaxarion"

Abstract

The paper examines the literary and theological significance of Shechem in the Joseph traditions and explores their reception in the Byzantine Synaxarion for Holy and Great Monday. Particular attention is given to the transformation of Joseph's biblical identity through Christological typology, as his betrayal, suffering, moral integrity, and exaltation become prefigurations of Christ's Passion and glorification. Through a comparative reading of the biblical narratives and the Byzantine liturgical text, the paper investigates how Joseph's memory is preserved, reinterpreted, and selectively transmitted.

Key words

Shechem, Joseph, Synaxarion, liturgy, Great Monday.

Biographical Note

Rev. Dr. Srećko Koralija is the Director of the DOMUNI Research Institute (DRI) and a mentor for English-speaking students at DOMUNI Universitas. Previously, he served as Assistant Professor of Theology and Leadership at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (2024–2025) and as a postdoctoral researcher in the Moral Leadership program at the same university (2022–2024). He earned his PhD in Theology and Religious Studies from the University of Cambridge, where he was a Vice-Chancellor's Scholar at the Faculty of Divinity (2016–2020). He holds two master's degrees from the University of Oxford, in Oriental Studies and Syriac Studies, as well as a BA in Sacra Scriptura from the Pontifical Biblical Commission in Rome and

academic qualifications in theology from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. He has received numerous scholarships and grants supporting his research activities and participation in international conferences.

His teaching experience encompasses a wide range of subjects, including Organizational Economics and Management, Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Latin, Greek, and Patristics. He has published scholarly studies in areas such as moral leadership, the semantics of biblical language, and Syriac studies.

Recent Publications

Srećko Koralija, "A View on ἀτιμία and ὀνειδισμός in LXX-Jer," in A. T. Keenan and R. S. Walker (eds.), *Postclassical Greek and Cultural Identity in the Septuagint: In Memoriam: James K. Aitken (1968–2023)* (De Gruyter, 2027), 347–363 (forthcoming).

Srećko Koralija, O. Solinger, E. van Burg, and W. T. van Peursen, "Charisma in Organization Theory: Infusing and Maintaining Values in Institutions," *Organization Theory* 4 (2026) (forthcoming).

Srećko Koralija, "The Theophanic Glory of God: Reflections on Job 38–42," *Napoca Roots* 15.1 (2026): 65–80.

Srećko Koralija and K. Krkač, "Towards a Criterion Based Understanding of Gossip," *TELOS* 14 (2026): 22–32.

"so, when the Samaritans
came up to him,
they begged him
to stay with them.
He stayed for two days . . ."
— John 4:40 (NJB)

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