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# Was the Temple on Mount Gerizim Modelled after the Jerusalem Temple?

Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme

Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, 0315 Oslo, Norway; akgudme@teologi.uio.no

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**Abstract:** Was the Yahweh temple on Mount Gerizim modelled after the temple in Jerusalem? This question is important for our understanding of the sanctuary on Mount Gerizim and the people who worshipped there in the Persian and Hellenistic period; if the Gerizim temple was modelled after the Jerusalem temple, the argument in favour of the Gerizim cult as derived from the cult in Jerusalem is strengthened. On the other hand, if no such connection can be demonstrated convincingly, one must look elsewhere for the answer to the question of Samaritan origins. The present study gives a brief introduction to the relationship between early Judaism and early Samaritanism, or rather Southern and Northern Yahwism, followed by a presentation of Mount Gerizim and the excavations that were carried out there between 1982 and 2006. Finally, I shall turn to the theory that the temple on Mount Gerizim was modelled after the Jerusalem temple, which has been recast by Dr Yitzhak Magen (2008). I conclude that the archaeological remains from the Persian-period sanctuary on Mount Gerizim offer no evidence that this temple was modelled on the temple in Jerusalem.

**Keywords:** Mount Gerizim; temple; Jerusalem; early Samaritanism; early Judaism; Book of Ezekiel; Josephus

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## 1. Introduction

Was the Yahweh temple on Mount Gerizim modelled after the temple in Jerusalem?<sup>1</sup> This question is important for our understanding of the sanctuary on Mount Gerizim and the people who worshipped there; if indeed the Gerizim temple was formed after the pattern of the Jerusalem temple, the argument in favour of the Gerizim cult as derived from the cult in Jerusalem is strengthened. On the other hand, if no such connection can be demonstrated convincingly, one must look elsewhere for the answer to the question of Samaritan origins.

In the following, I shall first briefly introduce the issue at hand, the relationship between early Judaism and early Samaritanism, or rather Southern and Northern Yahwism in the Persian and Hellenistic period. Then, I shall move on to a presentation of the site of Mount Gerizim and the excavations that were carried out there between 1982 and 2006. Finally, I shall turn to the theory that the temple on Mount Gerizim was modelled after the Jerusalem temple, which has recently been recast by the director of the Mount Gerizim Excavations, Dr Yitzhak Magen.

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<sup>1</sup> The present study is a slightly revised and updated version of a paper that I presented at the conference *The Other Temples in Dublin* in May 2012. The conference was organized by Dr Lidia Matassa on behalf of the Hekhal Society. Dr Matassa passed away in January 2016. I dedicate this article to her memory. An earlier version of this study appeared in Danish as (Gudme 2015).

## 2. Samaritanism and Judaism

Traditionally, research on the origins of the Samaritans has developed around two overall positions: that Samaritanism developed as a branch or even “sect” of Judaism and that Samaritanism is the uninterrupted continuation of Yahwism in the northern kingdom of Israel (Pummer 2010; Anderson and Giles 2012, pp. 7–23; Pummer 2016b, pp. 22–29). Lester Grabbe has named these two views “the polemic position” and “the apologetic position”, respectively (Grabbe 1999, pp. 14–15). In recent years, the scholarly consensus has moved away from “the polemic position” and has settled close to “the apologetic position”. As concluded in a recent monograph by Reinhard Pummer, “The Samaritans are not a sect that broke off from Judaism, but rather a branch of Yahwistic Israel in the same sense as the Jews” (Pummer 2016b, p. 29). For the time being, “the polemic position” seems to have “lost” the argument, but this dispute gives us a helpful framework for understanding the discussion about the relationship between the Gerizim temple and the Jerusalem temple, and therefore, I shall briefly summarize it below.

To put succinctly, the quest for the origin of the Samaritans is an attempt to explain how two religious traditions, Samaritanism and Judaism, which are understood today, both by themselves and others, as two independent religions, have so much in common with regard to sacred texts, traditions and rituals. Both Samaritanism and Judaism practice monotheism, aniconic worship, circumcision, Sabbath observance, synagogue attendance and the celebration of festivals as set out in the Pentateuch, albeit using different festival calendars. Finally, the two religions share very similar editions of the Pentateuch as part of their sacred writings (Coggins 1975, pp. 131–38; Powels 1989; Pummer 1989; Crown 1991, pp. 20–21; Knoppers 2005, pp. 313–14; Pummer 2010, pp. 15–16).

At some point in history, animosity or at least disagreement developed between Jews and Samaritans. This is illustrated, for instance, by the Gospel of John 4, where the Samaritan woman says to Jesus, “our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem” (v. 20, NRSV). So, at least in the 2nd c. CE, a disagreement over the proper place to worship was commonly known (Becking 2007, p. 213). It is debated, however, when and why the fundamental differences between Jews and Samaritans occurred, and therefore, the search for Samaritan origins is also often intertwined with a search for a date of the “Samaritan schism” (Pummer 2007, pp. 247–51). Traditionally, the schism has been joined with the *construction* of the temple on Mount Gerizim. However, because the impact of the Yehudite/Jerusalemite program of cult centralisation has been seriously questioned in recent years, a date for the Jewish–Samaritan disagreement is moving closer and closer to the *destruction* of the Gerizim temple towards the end of the second c. BCE (Schmidt 2001, pp. 116–31; Knowles 2006, pp. 19–53; Nihan 2007, p. 190).<sup>2</sup>

The advocates for the first, “polemic”, position, that Samaritanism is a Jewish “sect”, differ in presentation, but a recurring core in the argumentation is attributing some degree of historicity to the account of Samaritan origins in 2 Kings 17 and Josephus’ use of this passage in *Ant* 9.288–91 (Mor 1989; Hjelm 2000, pp. 13–74; Pummer 2010, pp. 1–5). According to 2 Kings 17:24–41, the king of Assyria brings in people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim to populate the cities of Samaria after the Israelites who were living there had been carried away to Assyria (v. 6). The new population in Samaria attempts to worship Yahweh. They even have one of the Israelite priests that were deported returned to them to teach them how to perform the cult of Yahweh, but the cult that emerges is a syncretistic mix of the cults of their homelands with that of Yahweh. In *Ant* 9.288–91, Josephus’ retelling of 2 Kings 17, he refers to the inhabitants of Samaria who were brought from the region Cuthah and are called “Cuthaeans” in Hebrew and “*Samareitai*”, Samaritans, in Greek (Pummer 2009, pp. 67–76;

<sup>2</sup> Magnar Kartveit writes that the moment the temple on Gerizim is built, we have “Samaritans” (Kartveit 2009, pp. 10 and 251). Against this view, see Pummer (2007), p. 250: “With regard to the question of the origin of the Samaritans, we should underline the fact that the existence of a Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim was not a sufficient reason for the separation between the YHWH worshippers in Jerusalem on the one hand and the YHWH worshippers in the region of Samaria on the other.”

Hjelm 2010b, pp. 93–94). The Samaritans may appear to be Jewish, but according to 2 Kings 17 and *Ant* 9, they are foreigners. The essence of understanding the Samaritans as an offshoot of Judaism is that Samaritanism is an importation and subsequent modification of Jewish worship. This view inevitably, if not intentionally, bestows a secondary status on Samaritanism.

The other, “apologetic”, position, that Samaritanism is a continuation of the ancient Israelite religion, roughly corresponds with the contemporary Samaritans’ own tradition regarding their origins. According to the Samaritan Chronicles, the Samaritans are the descendants of the original Israelites who remained faithful and stayed on Gerizim rather than following the apostate priest Eli to Shiloh. The temple cult in Jerusalem is seen as the eventual outcome of Eli’s apostasy (Gaster 1925, pp. 7–11; Grabbe 1999, pp. 14–15). The view that the Samaritans are descended from the inhabitants of the former northern kingdom of Israel presupposes that the account in 2 Kings 17 is inaccurate when it claims that all of Israel was exiled after the Assyrian conquest. Only the elite were deported, and some foreign peoples were brought to the region as settlers, but the majority of the indigenous population remained, and their way of life, their culture and religion, continued largely unaltered (Zertal 2003; Knoppers 2004; Hjelm 2010a, pp. 32–33).

The “apologetic” view that Samaritan Yahwism is a form of Yahwism in its own right, which developed either prior to or in parallel with Judean Yahwism, bestows either equal or primary status to early Samaritanism, and it denies that early Samaritanism should be entirely dependent on Judaic religious traditions.

### 3. The Sanctuary on Mount Gerizim

Mount Gerizim is situated south of the modern city of Nablus (ancient Neapolis) and biblical Schechem (Tell Balata). The site is approximately 30 km north of Jerusalem and 40 km east of the Mediterranean. Together with Mount Ebal to the North, Mount Gerizim overlooks the Nablus Valley and is the only east–west access to the hill country of Ephraim (Vos 1982; Zangenberg 2007, p. 2). Mount Gerizim is a holy place to the present-day Samaritan community that lives primarily in Holon and Luzah in Israel and Palestine. Luzah is the modern Samaritan village on Mount Gerizim to which the Samaritans in Nablus have moved during the past decades. The Samaritans ascend the mountain on a pilgrimage three times a year during the festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. The Samaritan community numbers about 750 people.<sup>3</sup> The mountain consists of three peaks: Jebel et-Tur, which is the main summit and rises 886 m above sea level, Tell er-Ras to the north (831 m) and to the west a wide and flat hill (807 m).

The majority of archaeological finds are concentrated on the main summit, Jebel et-Tur. On Tell er-Ras, which was excavated by Robert J. Bull in 1964, 1966 and 1968, the remains of a two-phase Zeus temple were uncovered (Bull 1997; Magen 2008a, p. 3; Zangenberg 2012).<sup>4</sup> The first proper excavations on Jebel et-Tur were carried out in 1929 by A.M. Schneider, a German archaeologist from Göttingen, who concentrated his efforts on the 5th c. CE Byzantine church dedicated to Mary Theotokos (Schneider 1951; Bull 1968; Hjelm 2010b, p. 25; Zangenberg 2012). From 1982 to 2006, extensive excavations were carried out on Mount Gerizim under the direction of Dr Yithzhak Magen, Staff Officer of Archaeology in Judaea and Samaria. The results of these excavations are being published in the series *Judea and Samaria Publications (JSP)* by the Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria and the Israel Antiquities Authorities. So far, two volumes related to Mount Gerizim have appeared: *Mount Gerizim Excavations Volume I (JSP 2)* is the preliminary publication of the Aramaic, Hebrew and Samaritan inscriptions from Mount Gerizim and *Mount Gerizim Excavations Volume II (JSP 8)*

<sup>3</sup> Registration by January 2013 is 756 Israelite Samaritans according to the Israelite Samaritan Information Institute’s website: <https://www.israelite-samaritans.com/about-israelite-samaritans/population-survey/> (visited on 5 December 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Robert J. Bull was a member of the Drew-McCormick Expedition to Tell Balata and his excavation of Tell er-Ras sprang from that expedition. No final report of the finds from Tell er-Ras has been published, but Bull published several preliminary reports and articles, see references in Bull 1997. By 1866, a survey of Tell er-Ras was carried out by Wilson (1873).

contains a preliminary report of the results of the excavations. Another three volumes expanding on the preliminary reports are expected to appear in the future (cf. Magen 2008a, pp. ix–x).<sup>5</sup>

During the Mount Gerizim excavations, a Yahwistic sanctuary from the Persian and Hellenistic periods and a city from the Hellenistic period were uncovered at the site. A Late-Roman-period citadel and the octagonal Byzantine church of Mary Theotokos were also uncovered and the Roman Temple to Zeus on Tell er-Ras north of the city was re-excavated (Magen 2007). The majority of the remains on the site date to the Hellenistic period. The sacred precinct is located beneath and around the church of Mary Theotokos, and the Hellenistic residential areas spread out mostly south of the precinct.<sup>6</sup> The sanctuary on the main summit shows signs of two main building phases: The first phase is the construction of the Persian-period sacred precinct in the 5th c. BCE (Magen 2007, p. 180; Magen 2008a, pp. 103, 167). This structure occupies the highest spot on the mountain and was the first structure to be built on the excavated parts of Mount Gerizim. Only further excavation will show if there are earlier structures on the main summit. The Persian-period sanctuary was active for approximately 250 years until the second building phase, which dates to the early 2nd c. BCE, during the reign of Antiochus III, when an enlarged sanctuary and precinct were built on top of the Persian-period structure. There are no signs of abandonment or discontinuity between the Persian and Hellenistic periods (Magen 2007, pp. 157–66; Magen 2008a, pp. 97–203). In fact, it seems that efforts have been made to continue the sacrificial cult in the precinct during the construction of the second building phase (Magen 2008a, p. 118). An interesting riddle is attached to the sanctuary on Mount Gerizim, because while it can be established without doubt that there was a sacred precinct containing a Yahwistic cult placed on the site from early in the 5th c. BCE to 111–110 BCE, an actual temple *building* has never been found. According to Magen's reconstruction of the sanctuary's development, there was a temple building both in the Persian and Hellenistic phases, but the remains have been almost completely destroyed because of extensive building activity in the Byzantine period. One exception is the structure known today as the "Twelve Stones", which Magen interprets as the only remaining part of the Persian-period temple building (Magen 2008a, pp. 113–14, 151–52).

According to Samaritan tradition, there was never a temple building on Mount Gerizim. Rather, Joshua erected the Mosaic tabernacle on Mount Gerizim immediately after the entry into Canaan, and it stood there until it was hidden during the dispute over Eli's illegitimate sanctuary in Shilo (Hjelm 2004, pp. 214–16; Pummer 2011; Magen 2008b, p. 151; Pummer 2016a). In spite of the lack of material remains of an actual temple building, it must be considered very likely that the sacred precinct on Mount Gerizim contained a "temple", understood as a built structure in which a sacrificial cult and other dedicatory rituals were carried out.<sup>7</sup> The deity on Mount Gerizim is addressed as Yahweh, *yhw*h (inscription no. 383), the Lord, *'dny*, and the God, *'lh*' (Magen et al. 2004, pp. 22–23, 254). One of the dedicatory inscriptions from Mount Gerizim recounts that the dedication was given "before the Lord in the temple/sanctuary" (*bmqdš*), and another inscription mentions "the house of sacrifice" (*bbyt dbh*'), the same term which is applied to the temple in Jerusalem in 2 Chronicles 7:12 (Magen et al. 2004, pp. 141, 171; Knowles 2006, p. 33; Magen 2007, p. 168). Regardless of whether a temple *building* was actually in the sacred precinct, a cult place that served exactly the same functions as a temple, including a sacrificial cult, was certainly there. This is confirmed beyond doubt both by the hundreds of dedicatory inscriptions and the impressive amount of bones and ashes found at the site (Magen et al. 2004; Dušek 2012; Gudme 2013, pp. 52–90). More than 300,000 bone fragments

<sup>5</sup> Besides *Mount Gerizim Excavations Volumes I and II* (Magen et al. 2004; Magen 2008a), results from the excavations have been published in a number of articles. (Magen 2007) gives a helpful introduction to the site and the most important finds. For a comprehensive and updated bibliography, see (Magen 2008a; Pummer 2016b).

<sup>6</sup> It has not been possible to obtain permission to reproduce photographs, floor plans and drawings from *Mount Gerizim Excavations Volumes I and II*. Therefore, I must refer readers to the illustrations in Magen 2008a. For a plan of the entire excavated area on Mount Gerizim, see Figure 4 on page 7.

<sup>7</sup> Architecturally, a "temple" or sanctuary structure can be many different things. See the excellent presentations of data in (Zevit 2001, p. 123ff; and Edelman 2010, pp. 89ff), and compare with the Greek examples in (Pedley 2005).

from sheep, goats, cows and pigeons have been found within the sacred precinct so far (Magen 2008a, pp. 160–62).

The Hellenistic-period city was founded around the sacred precinct in the late 4th c. BCE and reached its maximal size of about 400 dunams, which is 800 m long and some 500 m wide, in the second c. BCE. When the city was at its height of expansion, the population may have numbered as many as 10,000 inhabitants (Magen 2008a, p. 177).<sup>8</sup> There are very few natural resources on Mount Gerizim, and therefore, no economic or agricultural reasons for founding a city on the site. The primary reasons for the city's location are most likely religious; the sanctuary was there first, and the city grew up around it more than a century after the founding of the sanctuary (Magen 2008a, pp. 3–8). According to the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) version of Deuteronomy 27, Yahweh commanded Joshua to erect his altar on Mount Gerizim not Mount Ebal, and thus, Gerizim is singled out as Yahweh's chosen abode (Hjelm 2000, p. 92; Sacchi 2000, p. 156). In later Samaritan traditions, Joshua brings the tabernacle to Mount Gerizim shortly after the arrival in Canaan (Pummer 2011). It is likely that the rapid growth of the city in the Hellenistic period was a result of the destruction of the capital city, Samaria, by Alexander the Great in 332 BCE (Magen 2008a, p. 98). The city was largely unfortified, and it showed no signs of extensive urban planning. The earliest parts of the city were built south of the sacred precinct, and later, it expanded primarily to the southwest, because the terrain was better there and close to the orchards around the city (Magen 2008a, pp. 9–12, 89–90, 100).<sup>9</sup> Both the city and sanctuary were destroyed by John Hyrcanus I in 111–110 BCE. After the destruction, the city remained uninhabited. In the early 4th c. CE during the Byzantine period, parts of the sacred precinct were reconstructed by the Samaritans, and in the late 5th c., the area was badly damaged when the emperor Zeno demolished the precinct in order to make way for the construction of the Theotokos church (Magen 2008a, p. 178).

#### 4. The Founding of the Sanctuary on Mount Gerizim

Two important conclusions regarding the history of religions on Mount Gerizim can be drawn immediately from Magen's excavations on Tell er-Ras and the mountain's main summit, Jebel et-Tur. First, the sanctuary dedicated to Zeus, discovered by Bull on Tell er-Ras, had, both by the excavator himself and others, been interpreted as the remains of the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. The temple consisted of two phases, Building A, which Bull dated to the 2nd c. CE, and Building B, which was situated below Building A and was dated by Bull to the 4th c. BCE. Bull assumed that Building B was the temple, which, according to Josephus (*Ant* 11.302ff., 13.255ff.; *War* 1.62ff.), was built on Gerizim by Sanballat the governor of Samaria during the reign of Alexander the Great (Bull 1968, pp. 70–71; Bull 1997; Magen 2007, p. 157, n. 2; Zangenberg 2012). Magen re-excavated Tell er-Ras and concluded that there are no signs of building activity on the site prior to the 3rd and 2nd c. BCE and that building B was part of a Roman-style temple dating to the 2nd c. CE with a later phase added in the early 3rd c. CE (Building A). Thus, Bull's theory of a Samaritan temple on Tell er-Ras has been refuted (Magen 2005, pp. 235–86, 253; Magen 2008a, pp. 157–58, 167, 174–75; Zangenberg 2012).

Secondly, the dating of the first building phase of the sanctuary on the main summit on Mount Gerizim to the fifth c. BCE definitively rebuts a dating of the foundation of the Samaritan temple to the reign of Alexander the Great in accordance with Josephus' account in the passages mentioned above (Magen 2007, pp. 180, 190–93; Pummer 2009, pp. 38–43). The background for the foundation of the temple on Mount Gerizim is frequently explained with reference to Josephus' account of the marriage between the daughter of the Samaritan (Cuthaeon) governor Sanballat and a priest from

<sup>8</sup> This number has been questioned by Jürgen Zangenberg, who thinks that it is too large (2012). The trouble is that Magen does not explain on what grounds the number 10,000 has been reached, and therefore, it is difficult to evaluate.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed description of the different quarters, see (Magen 2008a, pp. 3–93). Magen does write "the city grew mainly to the northwest because of the convenient lay of the land in that direction", but considering his earlier statement that "the slopes south and west of the sacred precinct are relatively gentle, and it is here where most of the dwellings were built. On the northern slope construction was sporadic, due to the rough and fractured surface" (Magen 2008a, p. 9), I am convinced he means southwest.

Jerusalem by the name of Manasseh (*Ant* 11.302–325). According to this story, Manasseh, who is the brother of the high priest in Jerusalem, is in danger of losing his right to the high priesthood because of the marriage, and therefore, he is ready to break off the alliance. Manasseh's father-in-law, however, promises to build a temple on Gerizim and make Manasseh his high priest only if he will go through with the marriage (Pummer 2009, pp. 107–19). If Josephus' account of the foundation of the temple is accepted as historical, the construction should be dated to 332 BCE during the reign of Alexander. However, as mentioned above, following the excavations on Mount Gerizim, such a date is no longer conceivable, because the founding of the temple has been dated on archaeological grounds to the 5th c. BCE (Schmidt 2001, p. 124).

In his reconstruction of the site's history, Magen proposes that the reason for founding the temple on Mount Gerizim in the 5th c. in fact matches Josephus' account in *Ant* 11, but that Josephus simply got the date wrong and that the Sanballat in question is Sanballat the Horonite, living "at the time of Nehemiah" according to Nehemiah 13:28. Magen suggests that Josephus may have confused the founding of the temple with the construction of the city on Gerizim, following Alexander's destruction of Samaria (2007, pp. 190–91). In Nehemiah 13, Nehemiah begs Yahweh to remember all his good deeds and accomplishments. Following an account of how Nehemiah rebuked and struggled with those Judeans who had married foreign women (vv. 23–27), he moves on to relate how he chased away one of the sons of the high priest, because he had defiled the priesthood by marrying a foreigner: "And one of the sons of Jehoiada, son of the high priest Eliashib, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; I chased him away from me" (Neh v. 28, NRSV). According to Magen, the temple on Mount Gerizim was modelled after the temple in Jerusalem and built by "Jewish priests who followed the grandson of Eliashib, who was married to the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite (Neh 13:28)" (2008a, p. 149). In this way, Magen places himself between "the polemic" and "the apologetic position" regarding the origins of Samaritanism. With regard to the religious *traditions* on Gerizim, Magen takes "the polemic position", because he thinks that the temple cult on Gerizim was derived from Jerusalem. However, with regard to the *people* performing these religious practices, the inhabitants in Samaria and on Gerizim, he does not identify them as descendants of foreign settlers.<sup>10</sup> He sees them rather as "the remnant of Israel" living in Samaria, which comes close to "the apologetic position" (Magen 2008a, pp. 167–68, 171–75). Magen suggests that in the first building phase, both the temple and precinct were copies of those in Jerusalem but that an independent Samaritan tradition developed in the second building phase in the Hellenistic period, where the temple, although still influenced by the Jerusalem temple, no longer directly imitated it (Magen 2008a, p. 98).

## 5. The Persian-Period Sanctuary

In order to investigate this claim, I shall turn to a survey of the Persian-period remains of the sanctuary on Mount Gerizim. As mentioned above, the Persian-period building phase of the sacred precinct on Mount Gerizim is the earliest structure excavated on the mountain. The precinct is founded on a fairly large and flat plateau, which made it unnecessary to cut out a platform in the bedrock (Magen 2008a, p. 97). The first Persian-period building phase is dated to the 5th c. BCE (Magen 2008a, pp. 167–71).<sup>11</sup> The Persian-period precinct was in use for about 250 years until around 200 BCE, when the precinct was expanded dramatically, and numerous buildings, courtyards and staircases were added. In the Persian period, the precinct measured 96 m from north to south and 98 m from east to west, but in the Hellenistic period, the precinct extended 212 m from north to south and 136 m from east to west (Magen 2008a, pp. 103, 143). The Persian-period precinct was a relatively small, square

<sup>10</sup> Magen writes, "Zertal's claim that the wedge decorations are evidence for the existence of peoples brought by the Assyrian king and settled in Samaria is unacceptable. Furthermore, we do not accept Zertal's use of the term 'Cuthaeans' for these peoples" (2008a, p. 167, n. 4).

<sup>11</sup> Jan Dušek thinks that the first building phase should be dated not to ca. 450 BCE, but rather to the last third of the 5th century BCE under Darius II (424–405) (Dušek 2012, pp. 3–4).

structure, constructed of fieldstones. The precinct consisted of an outer wall, of which the western side is the best preserved, a number of service rooms and courtyards inside the wall and possibly an oblong temple building, facing east, inside the courtyard (Magen 2008a, pp. 99–100). Compared with the later Hellenistic-period sacred precinct, it was small and poor. According to Magen, the consistent use of fieldstones in the Persian-period structure as opposed to ashlar in the Hellenistic period and the use of different kinds of plaster make it relatively easy to discern the two building phases (Magen 2008a, pp. 103, 117). The sanctuary had at least two gates, one to the north and one to the south. The northern gate has been fully excavated, whereas almost nothing remains of the southern gate. Although no remains of an eastern gate exist, Magen proposes a third gate to the east, which according to Magen's hypothesis was completely destroyed during the second building phase in the Hellenistic period (Magen 2008a, pp. 98–100, 103).<sup>12</sup>

The precinct's northern gate was probably one of two main points of access during the first building phase, as it is facing the main road to the city of Schechem. The other must have been the southern gate, which connected the precinct with the earliest parts of the city (Magen 2008a, pp. 100–2). In the Hellenistic period, the northern six-chamber gate was dismantled and filled in, and another four-chamber gate was built a little further to the west (Magen 2008a, p. 117). The southern gate was also dismantled in the Hellenistic period, and with the southward expansion of the precinct, the entrance was moved from the south to the west (Magen 2008a, p. 103).

The eastern side of the precinct ends in a steep slope just outside the wall. In the Hellenistic period, a four-chamber gate and a ramp or staircase leading to the gate was constructed. Some Persian-period retaining walls adjacent to the Hellenistic-period retaining walls of the staircase have been found, so there may have been a staircase or ramp already in the Persian period. As mentioned above, no remains of a Persian-period eastern gate have been discovered, and according to Magen, this area of the excavations was particularly plagued by "great stratigraphical problems", which prevents a detailed account of the eastern wall in the Persian and early-Hellenistic periods (Magen 2008a, p. 120). In spite of the lack of remains of an eastern gate, Magen reconstructs the outline of the Persian-period sanctuary as a precinct with three gates. Magen suggests that due to the inaccessibility of the eastern side of the sanctuary, the eastern gate was used primarily for ceremonial purposes during the precinct's first building phase (Magen 2008a, pp. 98–102). A plaster-covered stone altar was discovered in the centre of the square, adjacent to the Hellenistic-period eastern gate. The altar was found at the foundations of the gate and therefore presumably dates to the Persian period. The square was also plastered, and large amounts of ashes and animal bones were found around the altar (Magen 2008a, pp. 120–22). The best-preserved structure from the Persian period is the precinct's western wall. Remains of walls have been found here, both from the Persian and Hellenistic periods, but whereas the Hellenistic wall is almost gone because of building activity in later periods, the Persian wall is surprisingly well preserved. It would have been natural to build a gate in this part of the wall, because the site is very easily accessible from this side, but Magen estimates that this was not done because of the wall's proximity to the precinct's holy of holies, the innermost room of the temple (Magen 2008a, pp. 110–14). The Persian-period western wall has been preserved in its entire length. It measures 83.7 m, it is 1.3 m wide and, in some places, it is preserved to a height of up to 2 m. Along the western wall, in the southwest corner of the precinct, a building measuring 12 × 21.5 m was found. It consisted of a large courtyard with a room on each side. The floors of both rooms and courtyard were of packed earth covered in a thin layer of lime, and Persian-period pottery and coins, as well as bones from sacrificial animals, were found there. In the northwest corner of the precinct, another courtyard was found, which also yielded Persian-period pottery (Magen 2008a, p. 110). There seem to have been service rooms or chambers adjacent to the northern and eastern walls as well (Magen 2008a, pp. 110–22). Just east of the precinct's western wall is the previously mentioned structure called the "Twelve Stones". The

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<sup>12</sup> See Magen's reconstruction of the Persian-Period sanctuary in Magen (2008a), 143, figure 266.

structure is rectangular, made of large dressed fieldstones and measures  $6.5 \times 18$  m. Magen proposes that this structure is the only remains of the Persian-period monumental temple building and that the “Twelve Stones” are part of the first sanctuary’s Holy of Holies. The structure was not dismantled in the Hellenistic period, perhaps because of its sacred character (Magen 2008a, pp. 113–14).

To sum up, the Persian-period building phase at Mount Gerizim is represented by a well-preserved western wall with an adjacent building in the southwest corner and a partly preserved courtyard in the northwest corner. The Northern gate is wholly preserved as is the western end of the precinct’s northern wall. Only very scant remains of the precinct’s southern gate are preserved, and hardly anything remains of the precinct’s southern wall. Practically nothing remains of the precinct’s eastern wall, and there are no traces of a Persian-period eastern gate. Finally, there seem to be traces of service rooms in the precinct’s northeast corner and an altar adjacent to the later Hellenistic east gate. The Persian-period remains show no definitive evidence of an actual temple building on the site, unless one agrees with Magen that the structure called the Twelve Stones should be interpreted as the westernmost wall of such a structure.

## 6. The Gerizim Temple and the Jerusalem Temple

As mentioned above, Magen suggests that the Persian-period temple and sacred precinct on Mount Gerizim was built with the Jerusalem temple as its prototype (Magen 2008a, p. 141). Magen acknowledges that our knowledge of the Jerusalem temple is limited because of the lack of archaeological evidence and that the historical sources for the Persian-period temple in Jerusalem are difficult. Nevertheless, he attempts to reconstruct the outline of the Jerusalem temple on the basis of the temple vision in the Book of Ezekiel (40–48), the Mishnah tractate Middoth, the Temple Scroll and the Letter of Aristeas (Magen 2008a, pp. 141–49).<sup>13</sup> Most relevant for the Persian-period building phase on Mount Gerizim is Magen’s comparison with the temple described in Ezekiel, so this is what I shall focus on in the following. The Book of Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple in Jerusalem has not been unanimously accepted as a valid source to the outline of the Jerusalem temple in the early Persian period. Ezekiel’s description of an ideal temple is viewed by many as a purely literary construction, a “midrashic temple” as Michael Owen Wise has called it, which serves as a blueprint for a certain view of conceptual sanctuary space but which cannot be used to reconstruct an actual sanctuary building (Wise 1990, p. 199). Ezekiel’s “temple” is a problematic source for the historical Jerusalem temple, partly because the author gives us a sanctuary in only two dimensions and partly because of the highly idealised and ideological nature of the book (Carroll 1994, pp. 44–45; Stevenson 1996, pp. 4–5; George 2009, pp. 102–5). In spite of these reservations, I shall review Magen’s comparison of Ezekiel’s temple with the Persian-period temple on Mount Gerizim. Ezekiel’s temple consists of two courtyards. Both the outer and inner courtyards have three gates, one to the east, north and south. Within the inner courtyard are several chambers intended for the Levites and other temple servants (Ez 40:1–42:20). The altar for burnt offerings is placed immediately in front of the entrance to the temple building (40:47; 43:13–27). The temple faces east (47:1). In Ezekiel 43, the glory of Yahweh appears in the east and enters his new temple through the eastern gate (43:1–5). Therefore, it is stipulated that the east gate must remain closed. Only the prince is allowed to use it on the Sabbath and on the day of the new moon and other festivals (44:1–3; 46:1–12). Magen points out that both the Gerizim temple and the temple in Ezekiel are facing east and that both precincts have no gate on their western side, presumably because of the proximity to the precinct’s Holy of Holies (Magen 2008a, p. 146). Both these observations are correct of course, but it should be stressed that no actual temple building at Gerizim has been discovered so far, which means that the orientation of such a building remains hypothetical and that an east–west orientation is by no means unusual in Levantine temple structures. Magen then focuses

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the possibility of reconstructing the Persian-period Jerusalem temple on the basis of Biblical texts, see Edelman 2012, who recommends a reconstruction on the basis of 1 Kings 6 and 2 Chr 1–5.

his comparison on the layout of the gates in Ezekiel's temple and on Mount Gerizim. According to Ezekiel 46:9, the southern and northern gates of the temple are primarily for the use of the people. This is also where we get the peculiar bit of information that if someone enters through the south gate, they must exit through the north gate, and vice versa, because no one is allowed to exit the temple the way they came in. This description of the north and south gates as the entry for the common people corresponds well with Magen's interpretation of the north and south gates at Gerizim, which link up with the main road to Shechem to the north and the south gate, which faces the earliest parts of the city on Mount Gerizim (2008a, pp. 100–2, 147). Magen interprets the proposed, but undiscovered, eastern gate at Gerizim in light of the eastern gate in Ezekiel. He writes that it was probably used for ceremonial purposes only and presumably reserved for the governor of Samaria. Magen also interprets the Persian-period altar, which was discovered underneath the Hellenistic eastern gate, as proof that sacrifices were offered inside the eastern gate of the Persian period in accordance with the Book of Ezekiel (Magen 2008a, pp. 102, 147). There are two problems with this interpretation: First, in Ezekiel 46 it is stipulated that the prince must wait in the eastern gate while the priests offer his sacrifices:

“The prince shall enter by the vestibule of the gate from outside, and shall take his stand by the post of the gate. The priests shall offer his burnt-offering and his offerings of well-being, and he shall bow down at the threshold of the gate. Then he shall go out, but the gate shall not be closed until evening.” (v. 2, NRSV)

However, nowhere is it stated that the offerings brought by the prince are to be sacrificed anywhere else than on the main altar, and therefore, the Book of Ezekiel gives us no reason to assume an additional altar located adjacent to the east gate. There is also no reason to assume that the altar discovered underneath the Hellenistic period east gate in the Gerizim precinct is anything *but* the main altar at Gerizim, especially because it seems to have been positioned exactly in front of the entrance to the temple building if Magen is correct in his reconstruction of the latter.

Secondly, although Magen's reconstruction of the position and function of the Persian-period eastern gate seems persuasive, it must be stressed that no remains of an east gate dating to the Persian period have, in fact, been discovered at Mount Gerizim. Magen's assertion that the Persian-period sanctuary contained three gates is a hypothesis only—a hypothesis, which seems more than a little influenced by a reading of the Book of Ezekiel, at that.

## 7. Conclusions

A critical assessment of the Persian-period remains on Mount Gerizim shows that Magen's assertion that Ezekiel's temple plan “was most probably copied at Mt. Gerizim by the Jewish priests who followed the grandson of Eliashib, who was married to the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite (Neh. 13:28)” cannot be confirmed (Magen 2008a, p. 149).

Ezekiel's temple may not be a very reliable source for the Persian-period Jerusalem temple, but even if we disregard that reservation, the Persian-period material on Mount Gerizim does not warrant the conclusion that Ezekiel's temple plan was the inspiration for the Gerizim temple. There are the obvious differences of course, such as the fact that Ezekiel's temple has two courtyards whereas the Gerizim temple only has one. Moreover, the still-unsolved question of whether there was ever an actual temple *building* on Mount Gerizim persists. If there was not, a comparison with any of the temple descriptions in the Hebrew Bible becomes less obvious. However, apart from these difficulties, there seems to be a more urgent problem with Magen's conclusions regarding the sanctuary on Gerizim, namely, that the remains of the Persian-period sanctuary on Mount Gerizim are so scarce that they cannot justifiably be construed as an imitation of the Jerusalem temple as described in the Book of Ezekiel. There are no remains of an eastern gate and hardly any remains of the southern gate or the eastern and southern walls. In fact, one could go as far as to say that if one had not read the description of the Jerusalem temple in Ezekiel 40–48, a reconstruction such as Magen's reconstruction of the Persian-period sanctuary on Mount Gerizim would not have come to mind on the basis of the available Persian-period remains. Therefore, there seems to be little decisive archaeological evidence

in favour of the Gerizim temple being built with the Jerusalem temple as its model. This means that the little we know about the layout of the Gerizim temple in the Persian period cannot be used as an argument in favour of “the polemic position” mentioned above. It cannot, on the other hand, be used as a decisive argument in favour of “the apologetic position” either, because that would amount to an argument from silence. Thus, it seems that we must look elsewhere for an answer to the question of the origins of the northern Yahwists or early Samaritans.

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