The works of Josephus have been a great source of information on the Samaritans, ever since they were created. Even today—with an increased amount of material—Josephus constitutes a most valuable source from antiquity on this question. He refers to the Samaritans as he deems it appropriate throughout his account of history, and, taken together, this is a wealth of material. It will be considered in a separate chapter, and where it is needed in other chapters. In this chapter the focus is on the legacy from him. He has influenced the image of the Samaritans in several ways, even their own image of themselves.

2.1. Josephus’ Version of the Origin of the Samaritans

Josephus does not comment upon the origin of the Samaritans in the *Jewish War*, but the classic description of their origin is found in the *Antiquities*. The following story has influenced the understanding of this question until our own time, directly and indirectly.

He [Salmanasser] utterly exterminated the leadership of the Israelites, and transported the entire people to Media and Persia, among them also King Osees [Hoshea] whom he took alive. Moving other nations from a certain river called the Chouthas—for there is a river in the country of the Persians bearing this name—he settled them in Samareia and the country of the Israelites.¹

(⁴ Ant. 9.278 f.)

Compared to the corresponding description in the HB (2 Kgs 17), a novelty here is the assertion that the leadership of Samaria was exterminated and the land emptied of its inhabitants and completely resettled by a foreign population. In the HB there are indications of such an understanding of the situation, but it does not specify that the leadership was exterminated and that “the entire population” was deported. These are notions

that developed after the HB, perhaps because Josephus wanted to create parallel accounts of the destruction of Jerusalem, as in 2 Kgs. 25:18–21, and that of Samaria. Out of the five locations of origin for the deportees in 2 Kgs. 17:24 Josephus singles out Choutas, corresponding to the name for the Samaritans used by the Mishnah. A little later in the same context, Josephus elaborates on the topic:

Now those who were settled in Samaria were the “Chouthaioi” (Χουθαῖοι), for they are called by this name until today because they were brought in from the country called “Chouthas”; this is Persia, where there is a river that has this name. Each of the nations—there were five of them—brought its own god to Samaria. By adoring these, as was their ancestral custom, they aroused the greatest God to wrath and rage. For he inflicted them with a plague, by which they were afflicted. Ascertaining no cure for their calamities, they learned by way of an oracle that, if they worshipped the greatest God, this would be a source of safety to them. They therefore dispatched messengers to the king of the Assyrians and begged him to send them priests from those he had taken captive when he warred against the Israelites. Upon his sending these and their being taught the ordinances and reverence for this God, they worshipped him lavishly and the plague immediately ceased. Even now the name “Chouthaioi” continues to be used for these nations in the Hebrew language, whereas in Greek they are called “Samareitai” (Σαμαρεῖται). Whenever, by turns, they see things going well for the Judeans, they call themselves their relatives, in that they are descendants of Joseph [Joseph] and have family ties with them in virtue of that origin. When, however, they see that things are going badly for them [the Judeans], they say that they owe nothing to them and that they have no claim to their loyalty or race. Instead, they make themselves out to be migrants of another nation (ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἔτι καὶ νῦν). But about these matters we shall have to speak in a more suitable place.

Josephus here identifies the group as “Samaritans” (Σαμαρεῖται) in Greek and “Chouthaioi” (Χουθαῖοι) in Hebrew. The Greek name Σαμαρεῖται and the name of the area where they were settled, Σαμαρία, are related. In the same way, the name Χουθαῖοι (corresponding to the Hebrew נַחַת) reminds one of the place of origin, Χουθά in Persia (correspond-

---

2 Ibid., n. 1084.
3 Πρὸς μεταβολήν is translated in different ways. If it is taken as an expression of the Samaritans’ behaviour, the translation may be “Adapting their behaviour;” if it describes the circumstances, it will be as R. Hanhart’s translation “je nach der Lage,” R. Hanhart, “Zu den ältesten Traditionen über das samaritanische Schisma,” ErIsr 16 (1982): 106–115. C. T. Begg and P. Spilsbury connect the expression “even now” (ἐτὶ καὶ νῦν) to the names, and the expression πρὸς μεταβολήν is connected to the following sentence. 
4 Translated by Begg and Spilsbury, Judean Antiquities Books 8–10, 202 f. Greek words in brackets are added. Compare the different translation provided in chapter 4, p. 82.