CHAPTER FOUR

JOSEPHUS ON THE ORIGIN OF THE SAMARITANS1

4.1. Terminology and Sources

“There can be little doubt of Josephus’ prejudice against the Samaritans. In this, he reflects the general Jewish attitude of bitterness and contempt, as seen in rabbinic writings,” L. Feldman wrote in 1989.2 Doubt was raised, however, by R. Egger in her dissertation from 1986: she found that Josephus cannot be termed an anti-Samaritan author.3

The background for this difference of opinion is an important question: Which terms are used by Josephus to refer to the Samaritans? First, there are Ἱσαμαριταί (sing. Ἱσαμαρίτης, fem: Ἱσαμαρίτις) and Ἱσαμαρείς (sing. Ἱσαμαρέως, fem. Ἱσαμαρίτις)—do they both refer to the Samaritans or only one of them? In the latter case: which one? Then, there are Χονθαίοι, Ἱσκημίται, Ὑβραίοι and Σιδώνιοι—to which groups do they refer? Clearly, the answer to these questions will influence our decision about which texts speak about the Samaritans.

Egger has undertaken to investigate the terminology of Josephus on this point. Ἱσαμαρείς is found 49 times, Ἱσαμαρεῖται 18 times, Ἱσκημίται (including variants of this word) 17 times and Χονθαίοι 8 times.4 Are

1 I am indebted to Steve Mason and Honora Howell Chapman for valuable comments and suggestions on my work in this chapter.
3 Egger, Josephus Flavius und die Samaritaner, 311. She notes, however, a certain Ambivalenz, cf. 73, n. 176, referring to Ant. 9.291; 12.257; 11.340f. Cf. in general the important review by É. Nodet in RB 95 (1988): 288–294.
all the persons referred to by these designations really Samaritans, as the secondary literature will have us believe? 5

Egger defines the Samaritans as “the Samaritan religious community” (die Samaritanische Religionsgemeinschaft), a group believing in YHWH, holding Mount Gerizim as the chosen place, sacrificing to YHWH in the temple there, and regarding only the Pentateuch as Scripture. Josephus refers directly to that community by the expression “those of Gerizim,” (ἀπό …) τῶν ἐν Γαριζήν, Ant. 12.7. 6 The other expressions may occasionally refer to the Samaritans. Thus, in her opinion, texts that speak of the Samaritan religious community are only War 3.307–315 (massacre under Cerealius); Ant. 12.7.10 (deportation to Egypt; discussions in Egypt about the temple site); 13.74.f. (discussion in Egypt); 18.85–89 (Pilate stops the armed gathering to find the hidden temple vessels); these texts all mention “Gerizim.” Possible other texts are: War 1.592 par Ant. 17.69 (Antipater); War 2.111 par. Ant. 17.342 (Archaelaus’ brutality); Ant. 17.20 (Herod’s wife Malthace); 18.30 (scattering of human bones in the Jerusalem temple); 18.167 (Agrippa borrows a million drachmas from a freedman). 7

According to her, there are some clear tendencies: Josephus did not differentiate terminologically between the Samaritans and others. 8 Σαμαρείς refers to inhabitants of the city or region of Samaria, but not necessarily to them in their entirety. 9 For the Persian period, Σαμαρεῖται is the preferred term, as is Σαμαρεῖς for the period following the second century B.C.E. Some few texts refer to the Samaritans using the term Σαμαρεῖς.

An important observation is that the scribes who copied the manuscripts of Antiquities saw the two terms as synonyms: in the manuscripts Σαμαρεῖται is often substituted for Σαμαρεῖς. 10

As for the Σικιμῖται, Egger found that they were Sidonians settled to the west of Samaria in the time of the Persians, and therefore Josephus in Ant. 12.258 ff. makes the mistake of identifying them with settlers from Media and Persia. 11

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5 Egger, Josephus Flavius und die Samaritaner, 11.
6 Ibid., 20.
7 Ibid., 310.
8 Ibid., 250.
9 Ibid., 169.
10 Ibid., 249.
11 Ibid., 283 f.