

The Enigma of the Temple Site and the Word-play ‘Moriah’¹

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Abstract:

The name ‘Moriah’ is conventionally associated with the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. In Jewish tradition, this identification is attested in a number of texts, including one biblical reference (2 Chr 3:1). On the other hand, other biblical passages where we might expect such an identification do not contain the name ‘Moriah’ nor a precise localization. This study examines the enigmatic name ‘Moriah’, which in the narrative of the patriarch Abraham (Gen 22:1–19) – one of Israel’s primary foundation narratives – describes the sacrificial cult site without precisely locating it. This name is nowhere attested as a primary toponym. Its form is actually a common noun that generates significant semantic allusions to and connotations with several key motifs of the narrative in question. Hence, the term ‘Moriah’ is a skillful wordplay, a pun using allusions and imagination in the given literary context of the Abrahamic cycle. As part of the foundation narratives shared by the two ‘ecumenical’ communities of post-exilic Judaism, the name helps to etiologically legitimize the place of worship (*‘ha-maqom*, the temple) for both the Jerusalemite and Samaritan cultic communities without using real names and locations. The shared Torah text is open to both perspectives of reading and to both identifications that we find in the history of reception.

Keywords: Hebrew Bible; Abraham; narrative; topography; temple; word-play; Moriah; Gerizim

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This study deals with the question as to where the ‘Solomonic’ Temple was located and how the biblical texts deal with this issue which is a well-known riddle in biblical traditions.² In particular, I want to focus on the enigmatic portion of tradition, that Solomon built the house of the Lord – that is the central royal sanctuary of the ‘United Kingdom’ – on the Mount of Moriah

- 1 This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the XXXI. Colloquium biblicum in Prague (April 3–5, 2024). I am grateful to my colleagues, especially Filip Čapek and Jan Rückl, for their criticisms and suggestions for refinement. My thanks are also due to Caleb Harris for the language revision.
- 2 From the abundance of literature on this topic see in particular the recently published assessment of the current debate by Filip Čapek, *Temples in Transformation: Iron Age Interactions and Continuity in Material Culture and in Textual Traditions* (Beiträge zum Verstehen der Bibel 47), Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2023, 149–164.

and I want to deal especially with the question as to how this place is characterized in the first of the two passages where the term ‘Moriah’ occurs in the Bible (Gen 22:2).

The location of the house of the Lord built by Solomon

It is strange that in the narratives of the books of Kings it is not clearly stated where exactly Solomon built the temple of the Lord.³ It is obvious from the passages in 1 Kings that it was in Jerusalem or within the territory of the royal city, but the exact location is not given.

Specifically, in the passage 1 Kgs 3:1 the building of ‘the house of the Lord’ (the temple) is mentioned alongside the building of Solomon’s house (the royal palace) and the building of the walls of Jerusalem (fortification of the city). All three of these construction projects are essential, symbolic elements which feature in the establishment of this royal city. However, this text does not specify whether the temple was built inside or outside the walls of the City of David. The text also does not provide an exact location when it details the actual construction of ‘the house’ in 1 Kgs 6:1–10.

It is only from the following description of the consecration of the temple and the transfer of the ark of the Lord to its new dwelling place that we can deduce anything about the location – the house of the Lord is not in the City of David, but somewhere higher up. The furnishings of the sanctuary must be ‘carried up’ into the new house which is apparently located higher than the city (1 Kgs 8:1–6):

¹ Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up [להעלות] the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. [...]³ And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests carried the ark.

⁴ So they brought up [ויעלו] the ark of the LORD, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up [ויעלו אתם]. [...]

⁶ Then the priests brought in [ויבאו] the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place [אל־מקומו], in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim.

Surprisingly enough, where the house of the Lord was precisely located is also not expressed in any of these passages in the Book of Kings. We might

³ See Čapek, *Temples in Transformation*, 160f.

wonder whether or not this conspicuous absence is related to the Deuteronomistic strategy of ambiguously designating 'the place which the Lord chooses to have His name dwell there'. In this respect see the correspondence between the standard formula (Deut 12:5 e.a.) and the variant wording in 1 Kgs 14:21.⁴

As is well known, the direct identification of 'Mount Moriah' as the site of the Solomonic temple is contained in the variant narratives of King Solomon's activities in the books of Chronicles (2 Chr 3:1):

Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on the Mount of Moriah,⁵ where the LORD had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had designated, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

In the literary history of biblical traditions and texts, the Books of Chronicles are undoubtedly a very late witness, dating from the late Persian or perhaps even Hellenistic period.⁶ This does not mean, however, that this identification of Mount Moriah with the Temple Mount in Jerusalem did not exist earlier. The books of Chronicles merely attest to a relatively late (markedly post-exilic) date in which the identification was already known and used.

What is important in this regard, however, is that this testimony is a confessional one. The Books of Chronicles are by no means neutral descriptive accounts, but they express the unequivocal position of the proponents of the Jerusalemite tradition in the post-exilic era. Their perspective is quite close to the one we know from later records of Jewish tradition, rabbinic texts and the midrashim.⁷

4 1 Kgs 14:21: Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city that the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel to put his name there (identical wording of the last sentence in 2Chr 12:13).

5 2 Chr 3:1 ויחל שלמה לבנות את־בית־יהוה בירושלם בהר המזריִה

6 Ralph W. Klein, Art. Chronicles (Books), in: D. C. Allison – H.-J. Klauck – V. Leppin – B. McGinn – C.-L. Seow – H. Spieckermann – B. D. Walfish – E. Ziolkowski (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception. Vol. 5: Charisma – Czaczkes*, Berlin – Boston: de Gruyter, 2012, 226: 'A date for this work in the first half of the 4th century BCE, during the Persian Empire, is likely, but some scholars would date it to the first part of the Hellenistic period.' For a more detailed and critical assessment of the debate, see Konrad Schmid, *Literaturgeschichte des Alten Testaments*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008, 187–190.

7 E. g. Josephus Flavius, *Ant* I,226: '[Abraham] alone with his boy went to the mountain on which King David's sanctuary later stood [...]'. Talmud Yerushalmi, *Berakhot* 4:5.8: 'On Mount Moriah. The Great Rebbi Hiyya and Rebbi Yannai, one of them said that from there teaching goes out to the world, the other one said that from there fear goes out to

The attribution of the name ‘Moriah’ to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem has a clear ideological intent. It has not only a positive indicative value (who we are and how we understand ourselves), but in the Persian and Hellenistic period it has also a polemical function. It competes with the alternative Samaritan concept that locates the ‘Temple Mount’ with a central sanctuary on Mount Gerizim.⁸

All of these late texts and traditions that work with the term ‘Moriah’ are, according to the majority consensus of scholars, a reception and development of the various streams of interpretive traditions that emerged from the key passage which concerns Abraham’s trial in Gen 22. Although the Abrahamic narratives in the book of Genesis are currently dated to the post-exilic period (the Persian era), it is still appropriate to regard the occurrence of the term ‘Moriah’ in 2 Chr 3:1 as a reception or reinterpretation of this term known from the Abrahamic narrative. One clue as to why this is appropriate is the shift in wording – from the phrase ‘the land of Moriah’ to the term ‘Mount Moriah’ and its identification with the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. For in Gen 22 Moriah is not the name of a ‘mountain’ but of

the world. [...] The Great Rebbi Ḥiyya and Rebbi Yannai, one of them said that from there light goes out to the world, the other one said that from there curse goes out to the world. [...] Rebbi Ḥiyya and Rebbi Yannai, one of them said that from there inspiration goes out to the world, the other one said that from there the commandments go out to the world.’ Midrash *Bereshit Rabba* 55:7 refers: ‘Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai said: [God told Abraham to go] to the place that is aligned corresponding to the heavenly Temple.’ (See also note 14; Talmud and midrash quoted from *The Sefaria Midrash Rabba*, 2022 [online], [accessed 13. 6. 2024], available from: <https://www.sefaria.org>).

- 8 On this issue already Bernd J. Diebner, ‘Auf einem Berge im Lande Morija’ (Gen 22,2) oder: ‘In Jerusalem auf dem Berge Morija’ (2 Chr 3,1), in: *Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament* 23 (1986), 174–179 or Bernd J. Diebner, *Juda und Israel: Zur hermeneutischen Bedeutung der Spannung zwischen Judäa und Samarien für das Verständnis des TNK als Literatur*, in: Martin Prudký (ed.), *Landgabe: Festschrift für Jan Heller zum 70. Geburtstag*, Praha: Oikoyomenh, 1995, 86–132. More recently, the history and significance of the relationship between the Jerusalem and Samaria cultic communities for the formation of post-exilic Judaism and for the shaping of biblical texts has received considerable attention, see among others Gary Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; Jan Dušek, Mt. Gerizim Sanctuary, Its History and Enigma of Origin, in: *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 3/1 (2014), 111–133; Benedikt Hensel, *Juda und Samaria: Zum Verhältnis zweier nach-exilischer Jahwismen* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 110), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016; Benedikt Hensel, Das JHWH-Heiligtum am Garizim: ein archäologischer Befund und seine literar- und theologiegeschichtliche Einordnung, in: *Vetus Testamentum* 68/1 (2018), 73–93.

a 'land', and its location is not identified; indeed a reference to Jerusalem is only one of several interpretive possibilities.

Before discussing the term 'Moriah' and its aetiological meaning for the legitimization of the Israelite cult, I would like to say why and how it is possible to compare the data of such different texts and various traditions such as the ancestral narratives on the one hand and the Deuteronomistic or Chronistic history on the other.

All of these works can be considered to be part of a certain set of *foundation narratives* within the Bible. This type of narrative may include mythical and legendary material (patriarchal & exodus narratives) or traditions more firmly grounded in real history (Deuteronomistic history or Chronistic history). In either case, however, they are elaborated and rendered in such a way as to express in narrative form, for a given community of tradents, who the community is, what its basic characteristics are, why its identity is based as it is, and how and why it differs from alternative and rival communities. These narratives usually contain stories of origins and present a founding formative period in which the basic principles, policies, institutions and practices are laid. In addition, founding figures (forefathers, community leaders or first rulers) play an important role.

In the Hebrew Bible, several different founding narratives of the people of Israel are presented. In the Torah, first (1) a cycle of Patriarchal narratives, and then (2) a cycle of stories about the exodus from Egypt, the wandering in the wilderness, and the journey to the Promised Land. The Former Prophets offer another extensive series of foundation stories, (3) the so called Deuteronomistic History. Its alternative confessional reworking is then presented in the last part of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings, (4) the so-called Chronistic History.

In terms of our interest in the question of the establishment of a central sanctuary, it is significant that in each of these variant foundation narratives there are passages that either directly address it or at least symbolically anticipate it or indicate etiological motifs. In each of these narrative series which express the identity of Israel, the setting up of the sanctuary is somehow expressed and legitimized.

When we now proceed to present in more detail the passage of Genesis in which the term 'Moriah' is used, I want to approach these materials specifically as foundational stories and ask (1) what is the nature of the noun Moriah, (2) what is its function in the narrative, and (3) what its function in

the narrative means for our understanding of who the narrators and audience of these foundational stories of Israel are.

The land of Moriah – the topos of burnt offerings

As is well known, the name ‘Moriah’ is emblematic of the story of Abraham’s trial, the final passage in the Abrahamic cycle of the ancestral narratives (Gen 22:1–19).

Like many other ancestral narratives, the story of how ‘God tested Abraham’ begins with a divine command:

Gen 22:2a	[God tested Abraham] ... and said:
b	‘Take your son, your only one, whom you love, [namely] Isaac,
c	and go (you!) to <u>the land of Moriah</u> ,
d	and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will tell you!’

‘Moriah’ in this instruction is the name of ‘the land’ where Abraham is to go to sacrifice on one of the mountains.

At this point we must not ignore the fact that ‘the land’ (הָאָרֶץ *hā’ārec*) is one of the key terms in the whole Abrahamic cycle of narratives. In these passages it is used as a ‘motif word’ in the sense elucidated by Martin Buber.⁹ The primary instruction at the very beginning of the entire cycle is a very similar command by Yhwh, in which the term ‘land’ forms a key motif in the very first sentence:

⁹ Martin Buber, *Leitwortstil in der Erzählungen des Pentateuchs*, in: Martin Buber – Franz Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1936, 211–261.

Gen 12:1a	And the LORD said:
b	'Go (you!) <u>from your land</u> and your kindred and your father's house <u>to the land</u> that I will show you.'

If the first and last episodes of a narrative series begin identically with the command 'to go' into 'the land', expressed by the emphatic verb form לֵךְ-לְךָ (*lech-l'chā*), this is probably no coincidence, but strongly suggests the narrator's intention to create a compositional framework (inclusio).¹⁰ In Gen 22 we are faced with the climax of the line opened by the Lord's first speech to Abram in Gen 12:1–3, where he is called by the Lord to 'go out of his land [...] to the land which the Lord will reveal to him' [...] because 'the Lord will give this land to his descendants' (Gen 12:7).

'The land' (הָאָרֶץ *hā'ārec*) is referred to and dealt with in various ways in the first half of the Abrahamic cycle (Gen 12–14). It is significant for our topic that in key places this land (הָאָרֶץ *hā'ārec*) is characterized by utterances that are based on the verb 'to see' (רָאָה *r'h*):

- (a) Abraham is 'to go to a land that the Lord will show him, make him see, reveal' (רָאָה *r'h* Hi, 12:1).
- (b) After he gets there, the LORD Himself 'appears to him, makes Himself seen' (רָאָה *r'h* Ni, 12:7), and at that place (Shechem) Abraham marks the land with the altar of the LORD.¹¹
- (c) In the same way, Abraham marks with the altar another place where the Lord has commanded him 'to lift up his eyes and see from that place' the whole land to the four directions of the world; for 'the land which Abram sees there' (according to the instructions) God is giving him and his descendants (13:14–15 רָאָה *r'h* Q imperativ + particip).

¹⁰ The phrase the לֵךְ-לְךָ (*lech-l'chā*) occurs nowhere else in the entire Bible, only in Gen 12:1 and 22:2.

¹¹ To the strategy of Abraham's building altars in Gen 12:7, 12:8 a 13:18 see Karel Deurloo, Narrative Geography in the Abraham Cycle, in: *Oudtestamentische Studien* 26 (1990), 48–62.

Thus, ‘the land’ in question in the Abrahamic narratives is fundamentally characterized by forms of the verb ‘to see’ (ראה *r’h*).

If at the end of the cycle the narrator again uses his suggested phrase ‘go to the country [...]’ and attaches its designation ‘Moriah’, it is not surprising that since antiquity this term has been understood by many as deriving from the verb ‘to see’. Several ancient translations do not regard the form המריה (*ha-mōriyyā*) in Gen 22:2 to be a proper name, but rather appear to treat the term as a common noun derived from this verb:

Symmachus	εἰς τὴν γῆν τῆς ὀπτασίας	[go] to the country of appearance, of manifestation (~ Mal 3:2, Dan 10:1ff)
Aquila	εἰς τὴν γῆν τὴν καταφανῆ	[go] to the apparent / visible / clear / known country
Vulgata	et vade in terram visionis	and go to the country of vision

Spelling, etymology and allusions of the term Moriah

Let us now pay detailed attention to the spelling of the form ‘Moriah’, the possibilities of its derivation, its etymological relations and also its possible semantic connotations within its immediate literary context.

In the Masoretic text of Gen 22:2, the form ‘Moriah’ is determined by the article (הַמְּרִיָּה *ha-mōriyyā*), so that it is presented as a common noun. Possibly it can represent a type of proper noun created from a common one – like, for example, the names ‘Ai’ (אֵי *ha-‘ay* = ‘the place of desolation’) or ‘Jordan’ (הַיַּרְדֵּן *ha-yarden* ‘the descending [river]’). This means that the understanding of this term as a motive word (a term with a distinct semantic function) is not only a theoretical possibility but a plausible option.

In Gen 22:2 the consonantal form is written *defective* in all aspects (מריה *mryh*). It contains no *matres lectionis*¹² to indicate from which root it is derived.

It is a polysemous term and there are three basic possibilities how to derive the verb in this case:

- 1) The first option is the root ירה (*yrh*) which has – to make the issue a bit more complicated – three different meanings. This verbal root is a homonym of three different verbs:

¹² Theoretically the fourth consonant (י *yod*) could be a *mater lectionis*, but in the given form it is a (doubled) consonant forming a syllable with the vowel *a* (מריה *mōriyyā*).

- a) *yrh* ירה Hi – ‘to teach’, ‘to instruct’ (HALOT¹³ III.), Exo 24:12, Ps 27:11; participle מוֹרֶה *môrê* means ‘teacher’, Isa 30:20, Job 36:22. (see Gen 12:6 ‘the oak of Moreh’ and Judg 7:1 ‘the hill of Moreh’).
- b) *yrh* ירה Q or Hi – ‘to shoot [arrows]’ (HALOT I.) 2 Kgs 13:17; participle מוֹרֶה *môrê* means ‘archer’, 1 Sam 31:3, 2 Sam 11:24 e. a.
- c) *yrh* ירה Hi – ‘to water’ (HALOT II.), Hos 6:3; participle מוֹרֶה *môrê* means ‘raining’, Joel 2:23, Ps 84:7.
- 2) The root ירע *yr* Q – ‘to fear’, Gen 32:12, Exo 14:31.
- 3) The root ראה *r’h* Q – ‘to see’; Hi – ‘to show’, ‘to reveal’, ‘to let see’.

The traditional pronunciation with a long vowel *o* in the first syllable probably indicates its formation according to the verb group *primae yod* (פ"י, thus the second or the third meaning; cf. the spelling in 2 Chr 3:1, see below).

Let’s now discuss these three possibilities in detail.

1) Derivative of the verb ירה (*yrh*)

The first option derives the term ‘Moriah’ from the verb ירה (*yrh*). Notably, the participle מוֹרֶה *môrê* is used with all three meaning variants in the Hebrew Bible (see above). That means that this form in conjunction with the theophoric affix יה *yah* (the short form of יהוה *yhw’h*, the personal proper name of the God of Israel; cf. Exod 15:2, Pss 94:7, 113:1 e.a.) creates three conceivable meanings: (a) ‘my teacher is Yah’, (b) ‘my archer is Yah’ and (c) ‘Yah’s rain’.

All three meanings are not only theoretically possible, but are actually attested in the history of reception. All these meanings appear in the rich Jewish literary tradition and are used to generate meaning, interpretation and imagination drawing on the potential of this enigmatic name. The best example is a passage in the midrash Genesis Rabba where all three meanings are expressed (among others).¹⁴

¹³ *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (eds. Ludwig Köhler – Walther Baumgartner), Leiden: Brill, 1997 (abbreviated HALOT).

¹⁴ Midrash *Genesis Rabba* (55:7): “Go you to the land of Moriah” – Rabbi Hiyya Rabba and Rabbi Yanai, one said: To the place from which instruction [*horaa*] emerges to the world, and the other said: To the place from which fear [*yira*] emerges to the world. [...] Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: [It is called Moriah] because it is from there that the Holy One blessed be He shoots [*moreh*] at the nations of the world and dispatches them down to Gehenna. [...] The Rabbis say: To the place where incense is offered, just as it says: “I will go to the mountain of myrrh [*mor*], and to the hill of frankincense”

In the realm of the narration in question (Gen 22:1–19), the allusion to teaching is particularly appropriate. Namely, this narrative is entitled ‘a trial’ and in verse 12 its positive outcome is assessed, Abraham passed the test. Labeling the place with this motif – naming it ‘my teacher is Yah’ – is therefore a meaningful option. The name ‘Moriah’ makes sense here in this regard.

The other two meanings of this verb have no meaningful connotations in the present literary context.

2) Derivative of the verb ירא (yr')

The second possibility can be to derive the term ‘Moriah’ from the verb ירא yr' (Q ‘to fear’, ‘to honour’, ‘to give respect’). The majority of Samaritan manuscripts seem to favor this understanding. Their spelling of the term ‘Moriah’ keeps the letter *waw* before *resh* while explicitly using *'aleph* after it: המוראה *hmwr'h* (majority spelling) or המוריאה *hmwry'h* (ms M2).¹⁵

Again, in the literary context of the narrative in Gen 22, this is a quite appropriate motif and has a meaningful connotation. For when the Lord’s messenger announces the result of the test, he phrases the outcome using a form derived from this verbal root (Gen 22:12):

כי עתה ידעתי כי־ירא אלהים אתה	‘Now I have known that you are a God-fearing one!’
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Let us point out, that the expression ‘God-fearing’ (ירא אלהים *yr'ē 'ēlōhīm*) is quite unique in ancestral narratives. It only occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in the wisdom writings (Job 1:1.8, 2:3, Eccl 7:18).

Marking the place with this motif – naming it ‘my respect [belongs to] Yah’ – is again a meaningful option here. The name ‘Moriah’ can be heard as resonating with these connotations.

3) Derivative of the verb ראה (r'h)

The third way to derive the term ‘Moriah’ could be from the verb ראה *r'h* (Q ‘to see’; Hi ‘to show’, ‘to reveal’). The documented spellings do not strongly support this variant, but the Masoretic text could also be possibly read this

(Song of Songs 4:6).’ (Quoted from *The Sefaria Midrash Rabbah*, 2022 [online], [accessed 13. 6. 2024], available from: https://www.sefaria.org/Bereshit_Rabbah).

¹⁵ See Stefan Schorch (ed.), *Genesis* (The Samaritan Pentateuch), Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021, 147.

way – as a double-defective form of the verb ראה *r'h*. According to the evidence and analysis provided by *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon to the Old Testament*¹⁶ there are some analogies. In article ראה Hi among the derived proper nouns this dictionary not only mentions the form יראיָה *yir'iyā*, but also the double defective forms יריָה *riyyā* and יריָהוּ *riyyāhū*¹⁷.

As already mentioned above, a strong argument for associating the form 'Moriah' with the verb ראה *r'h* is the variant reading of the Greek and Latin translations. Symmachus and Aquila, though each in a different way, nevertheless unambiguously translate the phrase ארץ המריה (*rš hmryh*) as 'country of visual manifestation', 'country of vision'. In the same way, the Vulgate translates 'terra visionis'.

Another argument for this concept is the use of the verb 'to see' (ראה *r'h*) in connection with 'the land' (הארץ *ha-āres*) throughout the Abrahamic narrative cycle and especially in the given story of Abraham's trial. The verb 'to see' (ראה *r'h*) is used here in important moments which are indicative of the enigma of 'the place' (המקום *ha-māqôm*). Let us summarize this feature.

After God commands Abraham 'to go to the land of Moriah [...]' (Gen 22:2) the narrator states that 'he went to the place that God told him to go' (v. 3). Then, 'on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw (וירא *wayyar*) the place from afar' (v. 4).

On the lonely couple's journey together to the cult site, Isaac asks his father where there is a lamb to sacrifice since they are carrying the knife and fire (v. 7). Abraham's response at this crucial moment of his trial refers to God. In doing so, he uses the semantic possibilities of the verb 'to see' (ראה *r'h*) and says: 'God himself does see the lamb for a burnt offering, my son' (v. 8).

When Abraham and Isaac arrive at that place, Abraham sets up an altar there, binds Isaac, lays him on the altar, takes the knife, and stretches out his hand to sacrifice him [...]. However, addressed by God's messenger who called to him from heaven, he 'raises his eyes and sees' (this specific phrase is a figure expressing an epiphanic moment, cf. Gen 13:14, 18:2, 24:63 e.a.) – 'and behold, a ram'. So he takes it and sacrifices it in place of his son (v. 13).

¹⁶ HALOT, see note 13.

¹⁷ HALOT, art. 8580 ראה – Derivates (see 1 Chr 23:19, 24:23, 26:31; cf. also יריאל *yerī'el*).

And then comes the climax which connects ‘the name of that place’ with the semantic domain of the verb ‘to see’ (ראה *r’h*) – Abraham gave this place the name ‘Yhwh does see’ (יהוה יראה *yhwh yir’ē*, v. 14a).¹⁸

This statement expresses Abraham’s discernment and understanding at the end of the trial. The same phrase that in v. 8 expressed his hope at the time of the trial is now used again at the end of the story (v. 14) to express the confession of the one who has gone through the terrible test and is looking back on the whole event. The patriarch’s strong statement of confidence becomes an eloquent name for this emblematic place, ‘Yhwh does see!’

However, the etiological formula that expresses this (v. 14b) does not contain a simple repetition of the name that has just been proclaimed, but creates a pun indicating that the place has the nature of a sanctuary.¹⁹ For at this special ‘place’ the point is not only that ‘Yhwh sees’ (ראה *Q. yir’ē*), but rather that ‘Yhwh makes himself seen’ or ‘reveals himself’ (ראה *Ni yērā’ē*):

Gen 22:14	So Abraham called the name of that place:
	‘Yhwh does see!’ (יהוה יראה)
	As it is said to this day:
	‘On the mount Yhwh is to be seen / is visible / reveals himself’ (בְּהַר יְהוָה יֵרָאֶה)

The semantic impact of the utterance ‘Yhwh does see’ (ראה יהוה *yhwh yir’ē*) as ‘the name of this place’ (שם המקום ההוא *šēm ha-māqôm ha-hû*) may influence the listeners of this story to understand the term ‘Moriah’ in accordance with this proclamation, that is, as a pun on the verb ‘to see’ (ראה *r’h*). At the beginning of the story of Abraham’s trial, the name Moriah sounds rather enigmatic, though the narrator uses it as if it were a known name. If, at the end of the narrative, ‘the name of the place’ is explicitly proclaimed

¹⁸ Most of the modern English translation apply the verb ‘to provide’, e. g. the New Revised Standard Version: So Abraham called that place ‘The LORD will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.’ Another solution can be found in some of the older English translations which offer a ‘transcription’ of the phrase in the first sentence, e. g. the King James Version: And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, in the mount of the LORD it shall be seen. Interestingly, the revised translation of the Tanakh published by The Jewish Publication Society in 1985, provides this phrasing: And Abraham named that site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, ‘On the mount of the LORD there is vision.’

¹⁹ Cf. the variant reading in Targum Onkelos ואייל לך לארע פולחנא ‘go to the land of worship’.

and unambiguously double-referenced to the verb 'to see', this cannot be without impact on the understanding of the meaning of the form 'Moriah' itself.

Summing up this section: Considering how intentionally this narrative and the entire cycle of Abrahamic stories employs the verb 'to see' (ראה *r'ah* and its derivatives), the associations between the term 'Moriah' and the verb 'to see' should be taken seriously. It does not mean that there is a real etymological relation – it can rather be a skillful word-play, a pun using allusion and imagination in the given literary context.

However, in all of this, it must be taken into account that the masoretic tradition uses a strange spelling (in any aspect defective form of writing) which is ambiguous and is as open as possible to multiple connotations. Indeed, the polysemous pun 'Moriah', which allows for multiple ways of understanding, interpretation, and reception, is a fitting label for the enigmatic spot that, in the context of the ancestral narratives, symbolically anticipates the sacred 'place' (המקום *ha-māqôm*) on which 'until this day [of the narrator] the Lord makes himself visible' to the sons of Abraham and on which they offer sacrifices to him, both in Jerusalem and on Gerizim.

On the impact and reception history of this enigmatic motif

'Moriah', the name of a symbolic and enigmatic place, has demonstrated an extraordinary gravitational force and imaginative potential in Jewish tradition since the earliest times. From the Second Temple period, the history of the reception of biblical texts testifies how the name 'Moriah' has been used to establish relationships between motifs and genres that are considered essential for Jewish identity. Antony Swindell summarizes this impact in the following words:

Moriah is a major linking motif in early haggadic material, with God using dust from Moriah in the creation of Adam; Moriah as the site of altars used by Adam, Abel, Noah, and Shem; Moriah associated with the reign of Melchizedek; Moriah as the place of Jacob's vision; and Moriah as the basis of Solomon's temple.²⁰

20 Antony Swindell, Art. Moriah, IV. Literature, in: C. M. Furey – B. Matz – S. L. McKenzie – T. Römer – J. Schröter – B. D. Walfish – E. Ziolkowski (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception. Vol. 19: Midrash and Aggadah – Mourning*, Berlin – New York, 2021, 1031; pointing especially to Robert Graves – Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Myths*, London 1964 (2022), 60–64, 173–178, 184, 206–207.

The use of the term 'Moriah' as the name of one of the mountains and its application to identify the temple mount in Jerusalem is one of the examples of this creative reception. This identification is first attested in 2 Chr 3:1 which contains the only other occurrence of the term 'Moriah' in the Hebrew Bible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to summarize and focus my observations in seven points:

- 1) The identification of the site on which Solomon built the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem as 'Mount Moriah' is first attested in the the Chronistic history (2 Chr 3:1). It is a confessionally narrow-minded appropriation made by the authors in the interests of the Jerusalem cult community in late Persian or Hellenistic times. In doing so, they used and re-interpreted a term from the Genesis narratives that has a rich range of meanings and is open to 'ecumenical' use in its original context.
- 2) The name 'Moriah' as used in Gen 22:2 is not a designation of a real geographical place that would have been a known site on the map at any time in the pre-exilic era. It is a topos on the internal plan of the series of stories, a spot on the narrative map.²¹ The term *ha-moriah* is not a primary proper noun but a pun, which was used by the narrator to evoke functional associations to several key motifs in the narrative (Buber's 'Leit- und Motivwörter'²²).
- 3) The semantic construction of the narrative, as well as textual variants and ancient translations, show that the word 'Moriah', which can be considered a neologism, resonates in the given context with at least three verbs that are significant to the semantic composition of this literary unit – 'to teach' (יָרָה *yrh* Q), 'to fear' (יָרָא *yr' Q*) and especially 'to see' (רָאָה *r'h Q*) or 'to be seen', 'to reveal himself' (רָאָה *r'h Ni*).
- 4) The orthographic form of הַמֹּרְיָהּ (*ha-mōriyyā*) attested in Gen 22:2 (in the Masoretic text even controlled and secured by notes, *circellus masoreticus* and *masora parva*!) is maximally open to various ways of reading. It

21 On the issue of narrative maps see Detlef Jericke, Literarische Weltkarten im Alten Testament, in: *Orbis Terrarum* 13 (2015), 102–123.

22 Buber, Leitwortstil in der Erzählungen des Pentateuchs, 211–261.

does not contain any *matres lectionis* that would indicate clear relationship to a particular verbal root (unlike 2 Chr 3:1, which by writing המוריה *hmwryh* suggests derivation from ירה *yrh*).

- 5) Samaritan tradition that associates the name 'Moriah' with the holy mountain Gerizim is most probably late. The sources do not allow us to trace its trajectory in antiquity, specifically in the Persian or Hellenistic period. The identification of the name Moriah with the Mount Gerizim can be seen as a similar step of explicit appropriation to that taken by the Jerusalem community in 2 Chr 3:1. The basis of this tradition and its implicit evidence, however, is the fact that the story of Abraham's sacrifice in Gen 22, is as much a part of scripture for the Samaritans as it is for the Jerusalemite Jews. This ecumenically shared founding narrative of the ancestors of Israel – precisely because of its geographical vagueness on the one hand and the character of the name as a pun on the other – allows for appropriation and subjective identification from the perspective of both the Jerusalemite and the Samaritan cult communities. Unlike the Books of Chronicles, the ancestral tradition in the book of Genesis allows for the legitimization of the temple of both the Jerusalemite and Samaritan communities of ancient Judaism in the 'second temple period'.
- 6) The only written record of the construction of the temple on Mount Gerizim is the not entirely reliable account of Josephus Flavius (*Ant* 11.302–347), who places the construction of the temple in the time of Sanballat, a Samaritan satrap of Samaria (around the time of the murder of Philip, the father of Alexander, in 336 BCE). Even if we would like to consider that the Temple of Yhwh in Samaria was established probably somewhat earlier – according to the archaeological research of Yitzhak Magen it should be in the 5th century BCE²³ – the era of Solomon should in any case remain purely symbolic, part of the domain of legitimizing legends and foundation narratives.
- 7) Unlike Christophe Nihan, who understands the mention of 'the mountain' in 'the land of Moriah' (Gen 22:2) as a reference to the Samaritan sanctua-

23 Yitzhak Magen, The Dating of the First Phase of the Samaritan Temple on Mount Gerizim in Light of the Archaeological Evidence, in: Oded Lipschits – Gary N. Knoppers – Rainer Albertz (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007, 157–211.

ry on Mt. Gerizim,²⁴ I want to emphasize that in the Abrahamic narratives ‘the place’ of the sacrifice, that legitimates the later temple site, is ecumenically open to both the Jerusalemite and Samaritan claims. The enigmatic designation and symbolic meaning of the site are important attributes of the ecumenically shared open data, which allows appropriation by both particular parties who enjoy a common tradition. As foundation narratives, the ancestral stories express the ‘ecumenical’ identity of ‘all Israel’, and the internal topography of these stories serves this purpose. For this reason, in the Abraham story in Gen 22 ‘Moriah’ is not and cannot be explicitly located neither in Jerusalem, nor on Gerizim. Direct explicit identification of this enigmatic place is a matter for the history of reception.

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²⁴ Christophe Nihan, Abraham Traditions and Cult Politics in the Persian Period. Moriyah and Šalem in Genesis, in: Mark G. Brett – Jakob Wöhrle – Friederike Neumann (eds.), *The Politics of the Ancestors: Exegetical and Historical Perspectives on Genesis 12–36* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 124), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018, 259–281; here 272.