

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SHILOH

What did Shiloh Symbolize?

After forty years of travel in the *Midbar*, the Jews crossed the Yarden and the *Mishkan* rested at Gilgal, near Yericho, during the seven years of conquest and the seven-year period of apportioning the Land. The Tribes no longer camped around the *Mishkan* but resided in their allotted areas. Yehoshua was their leader, and as a member of the tribe of Ephraim, he would have lived in their territory, north of Binyamin's area. At the end of these fourteen years, Yehoshua rebuilt the *Mishkan* at Shiloh on a more permanent basis. *Zevachim* 118a derives from *pesukim* that use both the depiction of "tent" and "house" to describe *Mishkan Shiloh*, that it was a cross between the two, with a stone structure underneath and canopies above. This implies that the wooden boards were not used for the walls.

ORIGINAL STRUCTURE RETAINED

The same *pesukim* are cited by *Yerushalmi*, *Megillah* (1:12), with an additional qualification. The *Yerushalmi* notes that the stone section was only ten *tefachim* high, but notes the difficulty that the items it contained, such as the *Menorah*, were higher than that. The *Yerushalmi* also quotes a Baraisa which compares the structure of the tent of Shiloh to that of the *Ohel Moed*, the *Mishkan* of the *Midbar*. The *Yerushalmi* explains that *Mishkan Shiloh* had a ten-*tefachim* stone wall, on top of which were placed the beams, upon which the covering was spread. Thus, the two Tabernacles were identical, both consisting of canopies hooked together and draped over wooden beams, bars, and sockets, except that in Shiloh the beams were fixed atop a stone wall.

LOCATION

It is rare to find such a detailed description of a location in Tanach. *Shoftim* (21:19) describes the place as north of Beis El, to the east of the *mesilah* (roadway – today Route 60) that goes up from Beis El to Shechem, and south of Levonah. Seven hundred years ago, Rav Ishtori Hafarchi, author of *Kaftor VaFerach*, identified Shiloh as a place the local Arabs called Sailun. Around 20 years ago, a 1,500-year-old mosaic floor was unearthed on the site that contained a Greek inscription mentioning the name Shiloh. Recent excavations provide convincing evidence that this identification is accurate – see below. *Zevachim* 118b, and also the abovementioned *Yerushalmi*, record a dispute whether *Mishkan Shiloh* was on Yosef's or Binyamin's territory. They suggest that the seemingly contradictory descriptions in the *pesukim* can be reconciled by saying that a strip of land extended from Yosef's portion and entered the portion of Binyamin. Rav Yehosef Schwartz (d. 1865) posits that this is extremely difficult to understand, as Shiloh is located well within Ephraim's (that is, Yosef's) territory. He therefore suggests that the correct reading in both *Bavli* and *Yerushalmi* should be the opposite way round, that a strip of land extended from Binyamin's portion and entered the portion of Yosef – see strip marked on map illustrated here (*Tevuos HaEretz* p. 179-181). He later found support for this correction in *Shmuel* I, 7:5 where the Radak cites a *Midrash* (*Midrash Shmuel* 13:1) which states clearly that a strip jutted out from Binyamin's territory into Yosef's area on which Shiloh was situated (*Pri Tevuah* p. 40b).

HALACHIC EVIDENCE

Zevachim 118a discusses the scriptural sources for a *halachah* unique to Shiloh, that although *kodshei kodashim* were eaten in Shiloh within the curtains of the courtyard, *kodshim kalim*, such as *shelamim*, could be eaten anywhere in sight of *Mishkan Shiloh*. The Gemara explains that in the merit of Yosef withstanding the temptation of Potifar's wife and averting his gaze from what was forbidden to him, the *Mishkan* in Yosef's territory would radiate *kedushah* and infuse anyone simply gazing at it, no matter the distance. One of the most striking experiences of anyone visiting Shiloh today is finding that the mountainside is absolutely saturated with millions of pottery shards – but only on the surfaces facing Shiloh. We are familiar with the *halachos* of *nossar*, leftovers of *korban* meat. The earthenware plates and utensils absorbed the flavor of the sacrifice and once its eating time-limit has expired, the utensil must be smashed, as the absorbed meat is now forbidden and the utensil cannot be *kashered*. Once one is past the area overlooking Shiloh, the fragments abruptly disappear. Equally remarkable are the thousands of animal bones collected during the recent excavations. Careful analysis of the bones found in the dig showed that almost all were from kosher animals, and over 75% of them were from the right side of the animal. This provides physical evidence of the practice of *matnos kehunah* – the *Kohen's* entitlement to consume the right thigh and chest of certain *korbanos*. The concentration of right-sided bones fits what you would expect from *kohanim* eating their allotted portions overlooking *Mishkan Shiloh*.

THE GIRLS OF SHILOH

The concluding *pesukim* of *Sefer Shoftim* state that, in the aftermath of the war against Binyamin, two hundred surviving Benjamite men remained unable to marry because of the oath to ostracize Binyamin. *Shoftim* 21:20-21 says that the elders directed the youths of Binyamin to: "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards and if the daughters of Shiloh go out to dance, you shall emerge from the vineyards, and each of you shall grab his wife from the daughters of Shiloh and go to



Strip of land projecting from Taanas Shiloh into Yosef's territory (map: Otzar Eretz Yisrael)

the land of Binyamin.” Parents were not allowed to get involved in arranging shidduchim for their sons because of the oath, but the elders allowed the youths to take matters into their own hands. The girls of Shiloh, having grown up in the vicinity of the *Mishkan*, were imbued with purity. Accordingly, they dressed accordingly in borrowed plain white clothes, not to embarrass the less wealthy girls, signifying their uniformity. They danced in a circle, where everyone is equidistant from the center, symbolizing that each considered themselves equally suited. The boys had to snatch up their prospective wives, without making any enquiries. There was a common purpose – to rebuild the tribe of Binyamin – and when the pair have positive character traits, any marriage can be successful.

PRAYER FOR A CHILD

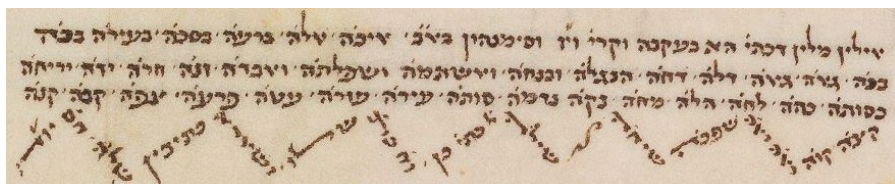
Shiloh is not an intrinsically holy place, and its sanctity was wholly dependent on it being the abode of the *Aron* containing the *luchos* in the *Mishkan*. Once the *Aron* was taken out to war and captured by the Pelishtim, the *Mishkan* ceased to be at Shiloh. However, it remains a special venue of prayer for childless women, because this is where Chanah was answered in her *tefillos* for a child. The Steipler Gaon attested that *tefillos* have a better chance of acceptance when conducted in a place where *tefillos* were answered in the past (*Derech Sichah*, vol. 1, p. 53).

CHRISTIAN ANGLE

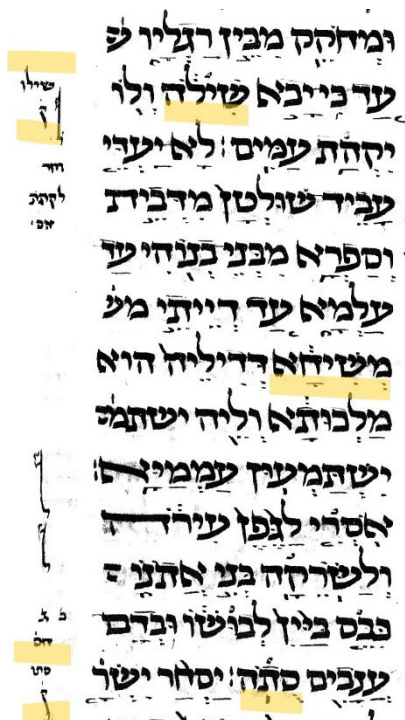
There is one reference to Shiloh in the Torah, in the blessing that Yaakov Avinu gave to Yehudah (*Bereishis* 49:10). The *pasuk* reads: *וְיָסוּר שֵׁבֶט מִיְּהוּדָה וּמִחֻקֵּק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו עַד כִּי יָבֹא שִׁילָה וְלֹא יָקָתָ עִמָּם* – The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah nor a scholar from among his descendants until Shiloh arrives and this will be an assemblage of nations. Several of the leading Rishonim were challenged by Christian clerics in disputations with this reference to Shiloh. The Targum translates Shiloh as referring to Moshiach. The Rokeach comments that the words *יָבֹא שִׁילָה* have the gematria of *Moshiach*. In a disputation with the Ramban, the Christians argued that the verse stipulated that the Jewish Kingdom would not depart until the arrival of Moshiach, and the cessation of the Jewish Kingdom with the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* was precisely the time when their leader emerged, indicating that he is *Moshiach*. The Ramban responded that the verse stipulated only that no other tribe would take over the kingship and that it cannot be interpreted otherwise (*Otzar Vikuchim* p. 87, 240). Others pointed out that Onkelos translated the reference to *Moshiach* long before their leader's birth, so obviously his intention was to refer to *Moshiach ben David*. Rabbeinu Ephraim (*Bereishis* 49:10) writes that the initial letters of the *pasuk* spell: *לא יש מום רע כישו*, there is no blemish as bad as Yeshu.

HOW TO SPELL SHILOH

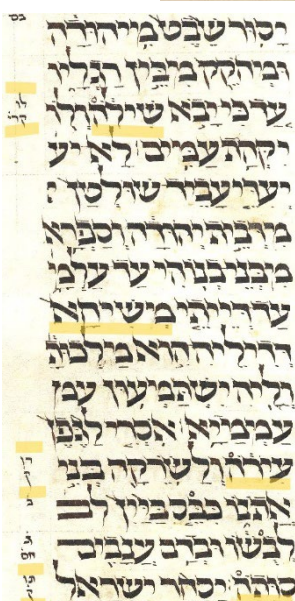
The *Masorah Gedolah* records that the way Shiloh is spelled in the Torah – *שילה* – is unique, and that there are three other spellings in Tanach – *שילו*, *שלו*, *שלה*. Although not found in our printed *Chumashim*, some manuscripts have a marginal note that the *kesiv* in the Torah is *שילה* but the *keri* is *שילו* (Leningrad Ms. SPIB 19A, Rome Community Ms. 7, Prague NK Breslau Ms. 9). Some indicate a similar *keri/kesiv* for two words in the following *pasuk* – *עירה*, *סויה*. However, I found a *masorah* with an alphabetical listing of words ending with *heh* but reading with *cholam*, which includes the latter two words but not Shiloh. This *masorah*, as illustrated, is from the Vienna National Library, Ms 28, and I have not found this *masorah* recorded in any other source. Evidently, there is a *machlokes* in the *masorah* regarding whether Shiloh is considered a *keri/kesiv*.



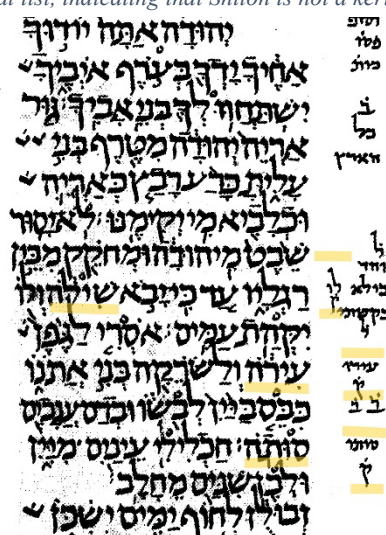
Vienna, ms. 28. *Masorah* recording words ending in *heh* but read with *vav*. It concludes by noting the different spellings of Shiloh, but does not include it in the alphabetical list, indicating that Shiloh is not a *keri/kesiv*.



Prague NK Breslau Ms. 9
Ashkenaz manuscript dated 1285



Rome Community Ms. 7
700-year-old Ashkenaz
manuscript.
Keri note highlighted in
three places.



1,000 year old
Leningrad
Eastern
manuscript.
Keri note
highlighted in
three places.