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Archive 2.0: Imagining The Michigan State University Israelite Samaritan Scroll Collection as the Foundation for a Thriving Social Network

Jim Ridolfo, University of Cincinnati
Michael McLeod, Michigan State University
William Hart-Davidson, Michigan State University

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I. Brief Project Summary

This project explores the benefits and challenges of pursuing a community-centered design approach for digital archives, a process we term an “archive 2.0” model of development. Our team aimed to create a new online archive which would include select pages from three fifteenth-century Samaritan Pentateuchs. As the name “archive 2.0” implies, we embrace both the technologies and the expanded possibilities for user participation associated with Web 2.0. More than simply adding the technological affordances of Web 2.0 to a traditional archive, however, our project uses these technological capabilities as a heuristic for reconsidering the very nature of an archive, both what it is and what it does. Unlike many existing digital, scholarly archive projects aimed at an audience of other archivists, from the very beginning our project has focused on engaging with the cultural and scholarly stakeholders associated with a particular collection of texts and artifacts. The archive in question is the E.K. Warren collection of Samaritan texts, scrolls, and artifacts housed at Michigan State University. The stakeholder communities include members of the 712-person Israelite Samaritan community located in Holon, Israel and the West Bank, Palestinian Authority, as well as biblical scholars from Michigan State University.

II. Summary of Project Findings

Digital archive initiatives generally and those in Biblical studies specifically primarily target and serve the research needs of scholars. As such scholar-centric projects, the design, organization, and implementation of many recent digitization efforts are not tailored to the needs of stakeholder communities who might also value the texts associated with these initiatives. Rather than lament or chastise this trend, in this paper we present findings that chart a new path for developing digital archives along with stakeholder community participants. Our exploratory project which included this participatory approach led us to three major findings:

1) The digital humanities provide a unique historical opportunity to engage and connect with cultural stakeholders, who were often dismissed or ignored in earlier archive projects. Re-centering cultural stakeholders as integral to the design process of digital archives is a potentially monumental opportunity.

2) Doing archive 2.0 community-centered design with multiple stakeholders has the potential to include and showcase other forms of knowledge besides the explicitly scholarly. In doing interviews with members of the Samaritan community in Holon and Mt. Gerizim, we learned about how the Samaritans organize and arrange their texts. By representing this organizational scheme in our archive 2.0 design, we provide a more culturally rich digital archive experience than what was possible in archive 1.0, or an archive tailored to one immediate stakeholder community.
3) The digital humanities are not simply about technology: new digitization efforts must make a methodological choice to either build upon or ignore the *humanities* aspect of the digital humanities. In other words, they must either take greater care to consider the people associated with texts and technologies or risk alienating potential readers and users of the digital project. Archive 1.0 was largely about a single stakeholder community and the nuts and bolts technology of putting images and texts on the web; archive 2.0 goes beyond technology to engage multiple stakeholder communities, including a larger set of procedural and methodological concerns.

The Samaritan collection at MSU provides an interesting, though certainly not unique, opportunity to explore the many ethical, scholarly, and design affordances in doing community-centered design with multiple stakeholders.

**III. Who are the Samaritans?**

The Samaritans have existed as a community for thousands of years; they are an ancient biblical people living primarily in Holon, Israel and Mt. Gerizim, West Bank[1]. Their Torah is similar in content to that of Jewish people, but with several major theological differences. For example, the Samaritan Torah maintains that Mt. Gerizim rather than Jerusalem is holy. The Samaritan Pentateuch also contains thousands of textual differences from the Masoretic Hebrew text; consequently, their interpretations and practices differ sharply from common Jewish interpretations and traditions. In addition, the script of the Samaritan Torah is written in Samaritan Hebrew which includes a unique script, pronunciation scheme, and grammar. Starting at a very early age, all Samaritan children in Holon and Kiryat Luza learn to read, write, and chant in Samaritan Hebrew.

The current Samaritan community includes 712 members, with approximately half the population living in Holon, Israel, and the other half living in the Mt. Gerizim village of Kiryat Luza. The community in Holon speaks Modern Hebrew as a first language, while the community in Kiryat Luza speaks Palestinian Arabic as a first language. The Samaritans living in Kiryat Luza maintain a delicate relationship with the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority. Being few in number and vulnerable to larger political trends, they seek a peaceful relationship with both authorities. For example, the residents of Kiryat Luza possess both Palestinian Authority and Israeli passports, vote in both elections, and work, travel, and study on both sides of the Green Line. Continued contact and connections between both communities is extremely important, as the Samaritans of Holon and Kiryat Luza commemorate all festivals, holidays, and lifecycle celebrations together as a whole on Mt. Gerizim. For this reason, the Samaritans remain actively concerned with the present and future Palestinian and Israeli political situation.
IV. Project History

The Michigan State University Chamberlin-Warren collection of Samaritan texts has more than a 100-year history in Michigan and comprises several dozen rare holdings. These range from the oldest piece, a "bluish-streaked, white marble bearing an inscription from Exodus that dates from between the third and sixth centuries," to 15th, 17th, 19th, and 20th-century copies of the Pentateuch, and 18th-century copies of religious texts and Samaritan prayer books ("MSU News"). The collection was acquired in 1901 when E.K. Warren, a wealthy industrialist from Three Oaks, Michigan, traveled to Jerusalem as part of the International Sunday School convention. At that time the Samaritan community was living under its most dire financial conditions, and the community was selling copies of its holy texts, some hundreds of years old, to pay for the most basic of necessities: food and shelter. According to MSU Professor of Religious Studies Robert T. Anderson:

E.K. Warren... purchased many of the treasures to hold in safekeeping until the Samaritans could repurchase them. The plan never came to fruition, Warren died and the Samaritan materials, legally part of Warren's estate, were shipped to Three Oaks where they were placed in a Warren family museum... In 1950 the Warren family closed the museum, and... the various collections were given to Michigan State University... The materials, with the exception of a brass scroll case and several modern paper scrolls, were placed in cardboard boxes in a storage area under the bleachers of the football stadium until a renovation of the area lead to their rediscovery in 1968. (41)

The rest of the Chamberlin-Warren collection was moved to better storage in 1968, and eventually moved to the MSU Libraries Office of Special Collections. Over the next forty years, only a handful of researchers traveled to East Lansing to conduct scholarship on the collection, and Emeritus Religious Studies Professor Robert Anderson has been the only MSU scholar to publish on the collection. While the texts were safely preserved in the basement of the MSU library, the Samaritan community in Israel and the West Bank continued to grow.

Binyamin Tsedaka, an elder of the Israelite Samaritan community and the publisher of the only current Samaritan newspaper, *The A. B. Samaritan News*, traveled from Israel to East Lansing, MI to address the MSU Board of Trustees on November 14, 2003. Speaking at the public comments section of the meeting, Tsedaka tried to explain to the Board that MSU was in possession of a collection of immense importance to the Samaritan people and that the university should do more to showcase the collection, promote its study and scholarship, and enhance access to the collection through public display ("Meeting Minutes"). Tsedaka returned to Israel with no commitment from the university to do anything new with the collection.

In 2008, Jim Ridolfo, a Ph.D. candidate in the Rhetoric and Writing program and Research Assistant at the Writing in Digital Environments (WIDE) Research Center discovered a description of the collection in the MSU Special Collections online catalogue. Ridolfo, who
had studied Hebrew for several years, was immediately interested in the unique collection. He began to research more about MSU’s acquisition of the collection, and during his search he found Binyamim Tsedaka’s November 2003 address to the MSU Board of Trustees. Excited by the stakeholder community’s active interest in the collection, Ridolfo contacted Mr. Tsedaka and inquired about the Samaritan community’s interest in collaborating on a potential digitization project (Ridolfo). The collaboration between WIDE and the Samaritan community began when Tsedaka responded back with his blessing:

We will be much honored with your blessed work. Go ahead with this and you have my pure blessings. The texts in your hands are very important and need a professional use. Displaying them before the public will be a great contribution to the world's culture. (Tsedaka)

Upon receipt of Tsedaka’s blessing, WIDE began to assemble and meet with a team of scholarly experts in Biblical/Samaritan Studies, Special Collections, Library Studies, and Hebrew Studies[2]. The Samaritan archive project would utilize the best practices in usability studies, and this required meeting and consulting with a range of professionals, each with specific expertise. In early 2008 Ridolfo met with Sharon Sullivan Dufour, the US representative for the A.B. Samaritan Studies Institute, to discuss how WIDE could collaborate on the design of a digital archive with the Samaritan community. This initial meeting enabled the WIDE team discuss project goals in addition to developing a detailed travel and work timeline for a three-stage design process.

V. Methodology and Design Process

Our project user-centered design methods such as focus-group interviews and individual usability sessions. This approach helped our team gather information from members of the user community in order to develop a design prototype that would best meet their needs. We engaged with community members and scholars as informants who could help us design better (i.e., more community-centered) interfaces for the online Samaritan archive. In keeping with the best practices of user-centered design, we followed an iterative design pattern, meaning that after each round of mock-ups and prototypes we went back to the community for feedback. This feedback was crucial not only in shaping interfaces the community would find useful, but also in helping us identify specific areas where our observations about the user community and their needs were incorrect or inaccurate. Because our aims in this study were to produce formative feedback with the goal of developing an archive prototype, our sample was a convenience sample. We solicited participants who were willing and able to offer us an hour of their time.

In 2008, we conducted early interviews with experts representing our two primary stakeholder groups. The first was with noted Samaritan scholar Professor Robert Anderson, who showed us how textual scholars go about studying and cross-checking the Samaritan Pentateuch with other versions. Professor Anderson’s feedback helped us
consider how scholars might more effectively use a digital archive. The second interview in November was with Samaritan Elder Binyamin Tsedaka, who traveled from Holon, Israel to Michigan State University while on a national speaking tour. WIDE corresponded with Tsedaka through e-mail prior to his visit and developed with several mockup archive designs. We presented him with these mock-up designs and used his feedback to them in preparation for our May 2009 research trip to the Samaritan community in Israel and the West Bank.

Meeting to discuss the NEH project in the house of the Samaritan High Priest on Mt. Gerizim, Palestinian Authority, 5/26/2009.

From left to right: Binyamin Tsedaka, editor of the A.B. Samaritan News, the Samaritan High Priest Elazar ben Tsedaka ben Yitzhaq, Gus Whalen, the great-grandson of E.K. Warren, and Jim Ridolfo, WIDE Research Center.

These early, informal interviews provided us with enough information to prepare for our more extensive individual and group "walkthroughs" of the revised archive designs in Israel and the West Bank. In May of 2009, Jim Ridolfo and Michael McLeod traveled to Holon, Israel and Mt. Gerizim, Palestinian Authority to conduct the second round of research. We conducted formal interviews over the course of two days, met with the Samaritan High Priest Elazar ben Tsedaka ben Yitzhaq, and attended meetings and ceremonial functions with families in the community. On Mt. Gerizim we conducted three individual usability sessions; interviews were conducted in an apartment made available to us by the community for this purpose. We showed each participant images of the site design, including sketches and mock-ups (images 1, 2, and 3), and asked each participant questions about how the planned features intersected with his or her goals for accessing the texts in the archive. In addition, we also asked individuals to perform some of the tasks discussed in the group session using the prototype or, if this was not yet possible, to help us see how they might perform such tasks. We anticipated that this second type of data gathering session would provide more detailed feedback on task sequences as well as specific types of interactions users wanted the archive system to support. In addition, we conducted a group "walkthrough" with members of the Samaritan community in Holon, Israel. This "walkthrough" functioned largely in the same manner as the individual interviews, but it provided us with the added benefit of listening to groups of participants
discuss the various mockup archive designs with each other, rather than only responding to and interacting with us, the researchers.

During these interviews we made a number of observations regarding the Samaritan community’s textual practices that significantly influenced our work toward a functional, community-centered prototype. One of the first responses we received from our participants was that our "quick browse" interface (image #2), which we designed to enable users to quickly skim through a Pentateuch, would almost never be used. Participants told us that they rarely browse widely through their texts, but instead they more often skip directly to the specific weekly Torah portion (parsha) section. In response to our page detail mockup (image #3), the Samaritans we interviewed told us that they do not use the chapter-and-verse method of dividing and navigating their Torah, the method most often used by biblical scholars. Since Samaritan children are required to memorize and orally chant the Torah from an early age, they are intimately familiar with the text. We learned from these interviews that our first prototype was based on scholarly rather than community-based reading and browsing patterns. In Holon, community members showed us a more modern version of a Pentateuch that includes the corresponding numbers at the beginning of each verse (image #7). To accommodate this different information architecture in our interfaces, participants suggested that each page be labeled according to its corresponding parsha name, instead of simply Exodus 3:12, for example. This information architecture would in turn make the digital archive more useful for any weekly Samaritan parsha study leading up to the Friday night Erev Shabbat, when all use of electronics stops until after sunset on Saturday.

Adopting the information architecture of the Samaritan parsha was a significant shift for us. Not only did our interface designs change, but also the information architecture upon which we based them. For example, the Samaritan parsha breakdown differs in many ways from the Jewish parsha structure, so we needed to spend time after our research trip corresponding with the Samaritans about their unique Samaritan Hebrew (as well as the transliterated English) names for each parsha section. We realized that we needed to build a tool to build this architecture, and this need in turn led to our first functional prototypes (images #4 and #5), what we’ve termed a Community-Centered Metadata Acquisition Tool, or a CCMAT. The CCMAT itself is a product of the IRB study and field research tailored to help include the community in the ecological growth of the archive metadata. We call this dual approach to community and metadata a Sustainable Ecological Archive Approach to Metadata (SEAAM). Our SEAAM philosophy is based on the idea that the ecology of a healthy digital archive requires sustained engagement by as many stakeholders as possible, and that ideally the ability to grow the metadata for digital archives rests more in the hands of stakeholder communities and less in the hands of designers and archivists.

The process of implementing a SEAAM and designing an effective CCMAT is a multi-tiered development cycle. For example, after further feedback from the community, we refined the CCMAT and made it even more specific to their needs (image #6). In practice, this version of the CCMAT metadata prototype, unlike our earliest prototypes, was directly informed by our field observations of how the Samaritans utilize memorization for textual navigation. Once this first prototype was functional we resumed our long-distance
dialogue with the Samaritans and asked for critical feedback and help in refining the prototype. Based on their feedback, we dropped the book labeling, word count features, and numerical verse identification of the first prototype and rebuilt the information architecture to model the Samaritan *parsha* structure (that data was supplied by the community). The interface was rebuilt to ask users to identify which *parshot* are included on each scanned page and to provide any notes that might be relevant to that particular page. The interface was also restructured to be bilingual and easier for the community to use. To date, the CCMAT has returned a significant amount of feedback and metadata that will help shape the archive 2.0 interfaces.

While the CCMAT itself is not an instance of an archive, we argue that it embodies one of the essential practices for archive 2.0: community engagement whenever possible. The CCMAT was a necessary step in the design process, one which includes a dialectic with the Samaritan community to establish a working information architecture. We think that such a step will often be necessary in other archive 2.0 projects, and in such instances the CCMAT would look considerably different, because it will be tailored to cultural and information design nuances specific to each community. In our CCMAT, the goal was to provide a way to collaborate with the Samaritans to build a schema for properly labeling and categorizing each of the scans. The CMAT is essential tool in the development of an archive that is meaningful and useful to cultural stakeholder communities. Creating these possibilities for meaningful participation in and use of the design are key components to archive 2.0 design practices.

**VI. Recommendations: Archive 2.0 as Design Platform for Cross-Collaboration and Outreach**

**A. Theorizing Archive 2.0**

We define archive 1.0 as the traditional, geographically-fixed, brick-and-mortar archive, one that strives to strike a balance between access to resources and preservation of materials. In our research for this project, we found that geographic distance posed the greatest access problem for cultural and scholarly stakeholder communities interested in the MSU Samaritan texts. In the last fifty years, only one cultural stakeholder has been able to travel from the West Bank to visit the collection in East Lansing. The problem of limited access is also true for the scholarly stakeholders. In the last fifty years only a handful of scholars have traveled to conduct scholarship on the collection.

One may conclude then that simply digitizing the entire collection would solve most access problems, but this is not the case. We learned from our interviews and field research that both stakeholder communities need particular language, feature, and interface considerations in order for them to effectively utilize the archival collections online. During this process of user and community-centered design, we began to realize that working collaboratively with the cultural stakeholder community was, in many examples, contrary to the colonial and imperial histories of many brick-and-mortar archives. Our rhetoric colleague Malea Powell, who regularly travels to archives and museums to see and interact
with the texts of her own tribal history, reminds us how the design of archive 1.0 is often connected to a violent colonial history (2008).

Informed by Powell’s work with archives and the scholarship of other indigenous methodology, such as the work of Craig Howe, we concluded that there is an ethical imperative in archive 2.0 to understand the relationship of the archive to cultural stakeholders. After determining the status of this relationship, it may be possible to pursue a digitization project, but it may also not be advisable. Cultural stakeholder communities, however, should be engaged when applicable. If the community is not engaged then there is the danger of continuing in digital environments some of the worst practices of many colonial histories. We therefore recommend that archive 2.0 include:

- consent from cultural stakeholder communities
- engagement with cultural stakeholder communities (when applicable)
- community-centered design in addition to user-centered design
- broad interdisciplinary collaboration with area specialists, special collections, university archivists, and usability/design experts
- active use of the archive as a communications tool to establish new extra-institutional relationships
- a Sustainable Metadata Ecology

We recommend that such an approach, while time consuming on the part of researchers, will ultimately produce a more purposeful digital archive. The archive will not only establish a relationship between the institution and the stakeholder communities, but if the community is co-creator of the archive, the digital archive itself may very well benefit from a wealth of metadata. In our research project, the community offered us the proper English pronunciation for the weekly Samaritan torah portions, as well as collectively helped us identify every single digital image through the use of our Community-Centered Metadata Acquisition Tool (CCMAT). We thus recommend that other comparable projects consider the potential benefits of a sustained methodological process of community engagement.

B. Lessons Learned in Developing the Samaritan Archive

One of our main objectives for the NEH Digital Start-Up is to develop a community-centered design approach for digital archives. Our iterative design process allowed us to propose many designs and features to members of the Samaritan community and refine those ideas based on their feedback. For example, we proposed supporting the recently-proposed UNICODE standard for the Samaritan script. As developers, we thought liturgical language support would be useful for the community. However, during our field research we learned that the Samaritan community had no interest in the digital script. Our participants informed us that they would much rather continue to read and type in Palestinian Arabic or Modern Hebrew; there was no community interest in creating metadata in the Samaritan script. This lead us to develop simple navigation interfaces in English, Hebrew, and Arabic:
From the very beginning we were also conscious of the sacred nature of these texts for our cultural stakeholder community, and at various stages in the project we've received the blessing of Samaritan elders, including the Samaritan High Priest, Elazar ben Tsedaka ben Yitzhaq, to pursue this work. But questions pertaining to digitization and sacredness came up not only in our formal IRB study with community members, but also in our informal discussions with the community. Here's one example:

14th Century Samaritan Pentateuch / One piece of cloth for each generation, roughly sixty generations in the same family / Mt. Gerizim, Palestinian Authority. 5/25/2009
The images above show a 14th-century Samaritan Pentateuch housed in a family library on Mt. Gerizim. The family has been in continuous possession of the codex for six hundred years, and each generation has marked their relation to the codex by adding a layer of protective cloth. Thus, in order to open the Pentateuch one needs to peel away over sixty layers of fine cloth. Should such a practice be translated into a digital archive? We decided no. From our field research we learned that the texts themselves would have no ritual value in the digital realm. We learned that younger, tech-savvy members of the community would likely use the archive to check up on a weekly Torah passage, to compare that passage to other versions, and e-mail URL’s back and forth to settle textual disagreements. Our participants informed us that they would also regularly go back to the archive and examine the acrostics, messages written from top to bottom through the scribal practice of lining up the text in a passage, because they are not only a historical curiosity but a unique source of community pride and genealogy. In one interview, a Samaritan was actually able to identify a relative in one of these passages.

While we as developers and researchers had a number of early ideas and features we were excited about, we ended up building our functional prototypes based on what would best suit the needs of the community. This meant ignoring design features we thought would be useful, like reading the full text of a pentateuch and UNICODE support. Instead, we created the Community-Centered Metadata Acquisition Tool to allow the Samaritans to build an information architecture that would better enable weekly Torah research, and future versions of the archive will focus on this as well as features making study of the acrostics simple and efficient.

C. Transforming Archival Practices

In the past, archives were constructed around the impetus of preservation, and thus the taxonomy used to catalogue and store materials was based on a single set of conventions. In archive 2.0, this does not have to be the case. Through collaboration with cultural stakeholders, archives can be designed, organized, and tailored more closely to the indigenous cultural values and taxonomies of cultural stakeholders while still incorporating standards required by scholars and archival institutions. But to achieve this balance, archive 2.0 necessitates a re-engagement with cultural stakeholders. For us, engagement took place through fieldwork and a participatory approach to design that were familiar to us, but we acknowledge that may constitute a new set of practices for other humanists.

For a text in the traditional brick and mortar archive, a minimal amount of writing is required for the archivist to maintain the text. Indeed, preservation is perhaps the chief role of the archivist, preserving access for a small number of specialists. In such a model, a cultural artifact need only have a reference number, proper storage, and the larger genus of a major collection, for example "19th-century Samaritan prayer books." As is the case with many Native American artifacts in vaults across the United States, the cultural violence represented by the removal of the artifact from tribal hands is continued, albeit unintentionally, in the brick-and-mortar archive due to the limited access tribal members have to these (their) materials. In the traditional archive the text is often turned into an
artifact, as is the case with Samaritan prayer books. In the name of preserving culture, cultural contact is cut off, the cultural context fades away, and the text becomes a silent call number with a very limited viewership.

Archive 2.0 responds to this problem by attempting to restore access, preserve cultural contact, and encourage cultural as well as scholarly use of archival materials. But in so doing, archive 2.0 poses a new, perhaps equally disturbing problem as the original removal and archiving of texts. While the brick-and-mortar archive silenced texts through its mission to preserve, archive 2.0 exponentially amplifies the potential reach of texts. The question of archive 2.0 then is, first and foremost, an ethical and methodological problem: what do we posit or write about and around the digitized materials to make them findable and to keep them usable, useful? The question of what to write is a research problem. We recommend that the digital archive either provides the chance to transform archival practices through the potential to engage with cultural stakeholders in a new, collaborative way, or the digitization and metadata effort can continue a long history of unethical practice. In other words, we argue that one can design an archive with web 2.0 technology, yet still continue to replicate hegemonic, often colonial archive 1.0 practices.

[1] Samaritans (also called in this article Israelite Samaritans, as this is how they refer to themselves in English)

[2] Many thanks to Marc Bernstein, Department of Hebrew Studies at MSU, Cynthia Ghering, University Archivist at MSU, Peter Berg, Director of Special Collections at MSU, and Janice Fernheimer, Assistant Professor of Rhetoric at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.
VII. Appendix

Image 1: Mockup #1 - Browsing the texts in an archive

Archive 2.0

Browse the Archive

Sort by:  Date Added  Document Date  Popularity

Pentateuch #e6059
Approx. Date: 1465  Last known owner: Joan Gray

Pentateuch #e83210
Approx. Date: 1601  Last known owner: Scott Summers

Pentateuch #f546278
Approx. Date: 1589  Last known owner: Aurora Husroo

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Mockup #1 - Browsing the texts in an archive

Archive 2.0

Browse the Archive

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Approx. Date: 1601  Last known owner: Scott Summers

Pentateuch #f546278
Approx. Date: 1589  Last known owner: Aurora Husroo

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Image 2: Mockup #2 - Graphically browsing through a text

Archive 2.0

Archive > Pentateuch #e56932 > Exodus 3:16
Image 3: Mockup #3 - page details with contextual commenting
Image 4: Mockup #4 - Zoomify framework for closeup zoom
information/ማדע

Parsha
Please tell us the Parsha/Parshot on this page by clicking the boxes.

☐ And these are the names (Exodus 1:1)
☐ When he will speak (Exodus 7:8)
☐ And to Aahron (Exodus 12:1)
☐ And Mooshe led (Exodus 15:22)
☐ In the third month (Exodus 19:1)
☐ And they shall raise a contribution for me (Exodus 25:1)
☐ And this is the thing (Exodus 29:3)
☐ And he gave to Mooshe (Exodus 31:18)
☐ And he made the boards (Exodus 36:20)

Notes
Please tell us any other important information about this image.

Add Note

Written August 9 at 1:55am
Ex. 20 16bAll 16b is not in the Jewish text then the next passage is Ex. 20 21a

When you are done, you only need return to the previous page. All the information is saved.

_source: Samaritan Pentateuch (cw2478a), circa 1484 CE, Page 3_
VIII. Works Cited


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