Speaking with Names: Reading the Geographical and Cultural Landscape of Shechem in Judges 8:30–9:57

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"Geographical landscapes are never culturally vacant."[1] When a person has knowledge of a place, directly or indirectly, that place becomes part of their experience, and everything related to the experience of that place can be elicited by the mere mention of its name. This gives the place power to speak, remind, criticize, or empower the individual in the present via the past. Keith Basso's award-winning ethnography *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (1997) is a study on the social use of place names in Western Apache oral narrative, an exposition of the Indigenous practice of "speaking with names." For Basso, "The ethnographic challenge is to fathom what it is that a particular landscape, filled to brimming with past and present significance, can be called upon to 'say,' and what, through the saying, it can be called upon to 'do.'"[2]

This challenge is by no means limited to Western Apache oral narrative. Basso has a hunch that studies with attention to place in other cultures will reveal that "sense of place is a universal genre of experience" and "may be found to exhibit transcultural qualities."[3] Basso's hunch is supported by examining the function of place naming in the story of Abimelech and the city of Shechem as preserved in the book of Judges (8:30–9:57). When read with the lens provided by *Wisdom Sits in Places,* this story, which was passed down through oral tradition and performance for a significant part of its history,

[1] Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 75.
[2] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 75.
[3] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 148.

takes on a new—or perhaps old—layer of meaning, one that reinforces certain conceptions of identity and reminds the audience of the social norms and expectations that are to define them as a culture, according to certain biblical authors. Most commentators on the book of Judges focus on the story of Abimelech, whose name means "My father is king," as a critique of kingship or as a statement about kinship relations, and correctly so.[4] By also paying attention to place, using the lens offered by Basso's ethnographic work, an additional layer of interpretive significance emerges, one that foregrounds geographic place as a repository of wisdom and illustrates the benefit of investigating the overlap between geographic landscapes and cultural landscapes in our interpretations of biblical (and other) texts.

A place name can speak volumes to those with knowledge of its cultural past, appealing to ancestral wisdom that is stored in individual and collective memories as each generation passes their stories and those of their ancestors onto the next. In the case of Shechem, its very name plays an essential role in the rhetorical strategy of the narrator of the Abimelech story because it is a name loaded with connotations of servitude, alliances turned sour, egoism run amok and tragic violence—but only if one knows its history. This argument is supported by an investigation into said history and an analysis of the text that draws out the various ways in which the narrator of Judg 8:30–9:57 uses place (and other) names as a rhetorical strategy that prompts the audience toward a particular interpretation of past events and that, perhaps most importantly, impresses upon the audience certain expectations for their own behavior in the present and future.

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[4] On kingship, see Albert Sui Hung Lee, *Dialogue on Monarchy in the Gideon-Abimelech Narrative: Ideological Reading in Light of Bakhtin's Dialogism*, BibInt 187 (Leiden: Brill, 2021); Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 114–118; J. Clinton McCann, *Judges*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 71–75; J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 162–194. On kinship, see Gordon Oeste, "Butchered Brothers and Betrayed Families: Degenerating Kinship Structures in the Book of Judges," *JSOT* 35 (2011): 295–316; Naomi Sternberg, "Social-Scientific Criticism: Judges 9 and Issues of Kinship," in *Judges & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 46–64; Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges*, Berit Olam (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 133–151.

Speaking with Names

In *Wisdom Sits in Places,* Basso analyzes the process, function and limitations of place-making in Apache oral tradition. Place-making is a form of narrative art that does not require special status or skill, only a series of interactions between memory, geography and imagination. It is a naturally occurring response to what Basso calls "common curiosities," answering questions such as "what happened here? who was involved? what was it like? why should it matter? – and anyone can be a place-maker who has the inclination."[5] Place-making is not the activity of only the individual, but also a cultural activity that encompasses the ideas and practices of the community. In this way, places are socially constructed.[6]

Place is not only socially constructed but also socially constructing, since "what people make of their places is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of society and inhabitants of the earth."[7] The goal of place-making is to construct the past in a way that creates a bond between language, land and moral consciousness that promotes compliance with social standards through self-reflection. Once a place is "made" and incorporated into the community, it becomes a resource for the storyteller who can use language to manipulate the bond between the people and the land to reach a desired end.[8] For example, the geographic name "Shades of Shit" elicits the memory of an event that occurred near Cibecue, Arizona in which people with much corn would not help relatives who had little. Angered, the relatives would not let them out of their homes, not even to the outhouse to defecate, so they had to go under their shades (brush-covered porches). "Then their relatives said, 'You have brought this on yourselves. Now you live in shades of shit!' Finally, they agreed to share their corn."[9] For one who knows

[5] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 5.
[6] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 74.
[7] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 7.
[8] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 5–6.
[9] Basso *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 24.

the story, the mere mention of Shades of Shit evokes an entire set of cultural values including communal responsibility, shame, cleanliness and sharing as illustrated by a specific narrative.

This practice is what the Western Apache call "speaking with names," a venerable practice "with which Western Apache speakers exploit the evocative power of place-names to comment on the moral conduct of persons," whether those of the past or those in the audience.[10] Western Apache storytellers often use the metaphor of "shooting an arrow" to describe what "speaking with names" does—it pierces whoever needs self-reflection and moral criticism. The story is not just about the characters and events therein, it is about the audience at whom it is directed.[11] Like shooting an arrow, "speaking with names" is a quick, clean and effective way to wound. The difference between speaking with names and hunting is that stories do not wound to kill but to initiate the process of healing.[12]

The goal of shooting someone with a story is to deepen and enlarge the target's understanding of the present in a way that brings about wisdom through self-reflection. The storyteller uses memory and imagination, both their own and that of the target, to create images of past possible worlds that illuminate the present and ultimately the future. In this way, the ancestors who first told stories about these places continue to voice their feelings and concerns about the present situation.[13] Places, then, are repositories of generations of wisdom and can be consulted or evoked for the sake of self-reflection. Since "wisdom *sits* in places," one must either mentally or physically journey to that place in order to gain the wisdom one needs, wisdom that enables people "to foresee disaster, fend off misfortune, and avoid explosive conflicts with other persons."[14] It is only when an attentive subject

[10] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 80.
[11] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 55.
[12] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 60.
[13] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 32.
[14] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 131.

and the geographical object come together that "places come to generate their own fields of meaning."[15]

Although there are no prerequisite skills necessary to be a place-maker or one who "shoots with an arrow," the storyteller is limited by the target's level of consciousness and historical knowledge. The voice a place possesses is not its own; places can only express what their animators and their hearers enable them to say.[16] If a target is inattentive or does not know the story of a place, then "speaking with names" and "shooting with an arrow" are ineffective and the repository of wisdom lies inactive.[17]

Place-Making at Shechem

The impact and message of the story of Abimelech at Shechem is enhanced by a number of details, from its location at the center of the book of Judges, to the fact that Abimelech differs from other leaders in the book on several accounts: he is king, not judge; he is chosen by popular demand, not the deity; his rule is set in a context of disobedience, not oppression; and he does not deliver his people.[18] Unlike the judges, Abimelech is an anti-hero and his reign is anti-climactic.[19]

In the sixty-three verses that it takes the narrator to tell the story of Abimelech, the geographic name Shechem is "spoken with" twenty-one times, including five times in the introduction to the story (9:1–6) and ten times when the relationship between Abimelech and Shechem turns sour (9:20–28), thus drawing attention to the fact that *this* story occurs in *this* place. Since places must be construct*ed* before they can become socially construct*ing*, let us first perform the act of place-making by answering the questions "what happened here? who was involved? what was it like?" so that we can later

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[15] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 108.
[16] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 108.
[17] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 146–147.
[18] Brian P. Irwin, "Not Just Any King: Abimelech, the Northern Monarchy, and the Final Form of Judges," *JBL* 131 (2012): 443–454. McCann, *Judges*, 71.
[19] Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, JSOTSup 68 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 69–80.

suggest an answer to the question "why does it matter?"[20] Before Judg 8:30–9:57 can successfully shoot its target using the city of Shechem as an arrow, the audience must first know the history of Shechem and what speaking with the city's name is designed to do. Like Shades of Shit, the name "Shechem" also has negative connotations, and the act of speaking its name to one who knows its backstory evokes an entire world of meaning. The city of Shechem, too, has a history of poor relationships among people. These relationships often take the form of political alliances or formal covenant agreements that end badly for Shechem, who is often the vassal. As Theodore Lewis notes, "every fragment of Shechemite tradition which has come down to us refers to some type of treaty" and most of these treaties end in bloodshed.[21] Place-making at Shechem, then, involves recalling this bloody covenantal past.

Archaeological and Epigraphic Data

The city of Shechem (Tel Balata) is located 65km north of Jerusalem and 2km east of modern Nablus, in the fertile flat-bottom valley running east to west between Mt. Ebal (north) and Mt. Gerizim (south). Erosion from the surrounding mountains onto the valley floor during the rainy season make Shechem a natural resource in and of itself. Grain and vegetables continue to grow well in the valley, while the surrounding hills support olive trees, vineyards, figs and grazing animals. In the ancient city, this rainfall also supplied a well located 400m outside its boundary, which provided enough water for neighboring villages in a time of drought.[22] Additionally, the city's location along the Shechem Pass, where four main roads converged, allowed the city to control commercial and military traffic throughout the region.[23] Access to water, fertile land and roads made Shechem a desirable location to control, whether directly or indirectly.

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[20] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 5.
[21] Theodore J. Lewis, "Baal-Berith," *ABD* 1:551.
[22] Lawrence E. Toombs, "Shechem," *ABD* 5:1175.
[23] Toombs, "Shechem," 1175.

Shechem was occupied from the Chalcolithic Period (ca. 4500–3200 BCE) until its final destruction in 107 BCE. The city was originally settled as an agricultural village then developed into an urban center during Middle Bronze I (ca. 1900–1750 BCE) and remained urban until destroyed by the Assyrian Empire in 724 BCE. According to the archaeological data, Shechem was destroyed either completely or in part approximately every 100 years. After a period of abandonment, the city was rebuilt by the Samaritans as a holy city (ca. 330 BCE) until Jewish forces destroyed it in 107 BCE.

The importance of Shechem as an urban center is also attested in epigraphic evidence. Early in the history of Shechem's urban occupation, the stele of an Egyptian noble, Khu-Sebek, describes pharaoh Sesostris III's (ca. 1880–1840 BCE) successful campaign against *Sekmem* (Shechem). Another Egyptian text, an execration text dating to the 20th–19th centuries BCE, names King Ibish-hadad of Shechem as an enemy of Egypt.[24] Its strategic location, quick growth and enemy status suggest that Shechem may have led a resistance against Egypt and may have been the head of a Canaanite city-state confederacy.[25]

Shechem's political relationships are again suspect in the 14th century BCE. After Egyptian control weakened ca. 1400 BCE, a man named Lab'ayu filled the power vacuum in the Levant and established a small Canaanite kingdom that included Shechem. The Amarna Letters contain several references to Lab'ayu and his sons who ruled Shechem and were political menaces throughout the region (EA 250, 255). According to EA 289, Lab'ayu gave the land of Shechem to the *hapiru*, a band of troublemaking, semi-nomadic people living in the wilderness.[26] Because of his involvement with the *hapiru*, Lab'ayu had to reaffirm his loyalty to Egypt on several occasions (*EA*

[24] Walter Harrelson, "Shechem in Extra-biblical References," *BA* 20 (1957):2–3.
[25] Edward F. Campbell and G. Ernest Wright, "Tribal League Shrines in Amman and Shechem," *BA* 32 (1969): 104–116. See also Toombs, "Shechem," 1179.
[26] On the possible connection between the *hapiru/habiru* and the "worthless and reckless fellows" that Abimelech hires in Judg 9:4, see Brian R. Doak, "'Some Worthless and Reckless Fellows': Landlessness and Parasocial Leadership in Judges," *JHebS* 11 (2011): 2–29.

252–254). He also threatened neighboring Megiddo (*EA* 244–245) and formed alliances with other rulers (*EA* 249, 263). Shechem thrived under Lab'ayu, but he and his sons made many enemies. Shechem was destroyed by fire at the end of their rule (ca. 1310 BCE).

Shechem in the Patriarchal Traditions

Shechem is an important location from the beginning of the biblical narrative, starting with the patriarchs. Shechem, specifically the oak of Moreh, is the first place Abram came to upon entering the land of Canaan and where Yahweh first promised him land saying, "To your offspring I will give this land" (Gen 12:6–7). [27] Abram immediately built an altar there, under the oak of Moreh in Shechem. This tree, which is later understood as sacred, is often mentioned in conjunction with ceremonies performed at Shechem, including covenant ceremonies and Abimelech's coronation (cf. Gen 35:4; Deut 11:30; Josh 24:26; Judg 9:6, 37).[28]

The city features more prominently in the Jacob narrative. Jacob comes to the city peacefully (Gen 33:18), buys land from the sons of Hamor—one of whom is named Shechem (33:19)—and erects an altar to *El Elohê-Israel* (33:20). Then, Shechem rapes Dinah, Jacob's daughter. This prompts an official agreement, made at the city gate, between Hamor's descendants and Jacob's descendants that allows for intermarriage and property sharing on the condition that the Shechemites are circumcised (34:20–24). While they are recovering, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons, kill all the males, recover their sister and plunder the city, taking the women and children (34:25–29). This is the first alliance made and fractured between the descendants of Jacob and the descendants of Hamor, a name that means "donkey, ass"—a point that becomes relevant later in this analysis. The story is clear that, although

[27]Translations from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.
[28]On the sacredness of this tree, see Lawrence E. Stager, "The Fortress-Temple at Shechem and the 'House of El, Lord of the Covenant'," in *REALIA DEI: Essays in Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Edward F. Campbell, Jr. at His Retirement*, eds. Prescott H. Williams, Jr. and Theodore Hiebert (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1999), 241–242.

exogamous marriage is not ideal (24:2–4), Jacob made this agreement with the intention of being faithful to it (34:30). Slaughter was not part of his initial plan, but years later, when Jacob gives Shechem to Joseph as an inheritance, he states that he himself took it from the hand of the local Amorites by sword and bow (48:22).

After the conflict, the deity tells Jacob to move to Bethel and raise another altar where he fled from his brother, Esau. Before leaving Shechem, Jacob tells his household, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments . . . So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth [oak] tree that was near Shechem" (35:2–4). This episode forges an explicit connection between Shechem and prohibited religious practice, a point that is retrieved in the prelude to the Abimelech narrative. After some time has passed, Jacob's sons return to the area to pasture their flocks (37:12–14).

This history of unsettling political relations and fractured agreements repeats itself in the story of Abimelech.

> The typological import of Genesis 34 emerges clearly from the invitation to amalgamation offered by the Canaanite father and son. It echoes the stringent prohibition of such contact in covenantal texts, especially Deuteronomy . . . it is this total, relentless hatred of Canaanites that Genesis 34 reflects and foreshadows in the communal slaughter of the Shechemites [Judg 9].[29]

Like Jacob, Abimelech intends to establish peaceful relations with Shechem, but a third party, in Jacob's case, his sons, and in Abimelech's case, the deity, imposes his own plan (Gen 34:25; Judg 9:23). In contrast with the Jacob story in which he and his descendants possess Shechem as an inheritance (Gen

[29]Stephen A. Geller, "The Sack of Shechem: The Use of Typology in Biblical Covenant Religion," *Prooftexts* 10 (1990):1–15 (2–3).

48:22; Josh 24:32), the deity's plan in Judg 9 does not include victory for either party of the agreement. In fact, the deity actively seeks to destroy both the Shechemites and Abimelech—the only Israelite in the book of Judges that is killed by the deity (9:16–20, 23–24, 56–57).

Shechem in Deuteronomy and Joshua

In the narrative space between Gen 34 and Josh 24, Shechem, "an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph" (Josh 24:32), is resettled with a Canaanite population, yet it remains important to the Deuteronomistic Historian (DH). Moses commands Joshua to set the covenant blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal, on either side of Shechem, beside the oak of Moreh (Deut 11:29–30, 27:1–26). Joshua carries out this command (Josh 8:30–35; 24:24–26), establishing the statutes of Yahweh at Shechem and erecting *matsebot*, "standing stones," as witnesses near the holy place or sanctuary of Yahweh that is under the oak (Josh 24:26). Furthermore, Joseph's bones are buried on Jacob's plot at Shechem (24:32), solidifying Shechem's importance for both DH and the patriarchal narratives.

Some suggest that Josh 24 describes a covenant between the Israelites and the Canaanites associated with the shrine at Shechem in which the Shechemites are absorbed into the covenant of Yahweh, just as the "mixed multitude" was absorbed in Exod 19:3–8.[30] This argument appeals to a parallel between the ultimatum to choose between Yahweh and the "gods of your fathers," "the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell," in Josh 24:15 and Gen 35:1–5, where Jacob gathers and buries the foreign gods that the captives from Shechem served.[31] Both Jacob and Joshua command the people, saying "Put away the foreign gods that are among you" (Gen 35:2; Josh 24:23). In Genesis and Joshua, the captives and citizens, respectively, are absorbed into

[30]Norman C. Habel, *Yahweh Versus Baal: A Conflict of Religious Cultures* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1964), 27–28; Moshe Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land: The Inheritance of the Land of Canaan by the Israelites* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 111.
[31]Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land*, 13.

the descendants of Jacob and are no longer distinguished as Shechemite or Canaanite.

This parallel with Gen 35:1–5 suggests that the people of Shechem entered a covenant agreement with Israel and Yahweh in Josh 24.[32] Lewis adds that "there is no reference to any battle or conquest of Shechem and most scholars agree that this is due to a covenant which was made between the Israelites and the Shechemites."[33] Additionally, Weinfeld points to parallels between Josh 24 and Hittite suzerainty treaties to support his thesis that the ceremony at Shechem is not a covenant renewal among the Israelites, but the establishment of a new covenant with the Shechemites, one which makes them Israel's vassal and servants of Yahweh.[34]

Etymology and Identity of Shechem

It has long been observed that, in ancient Southwest Asia, "what's in a name" truly matters.[35] Like Western Apache place names, the geographical referent "Shechem" relates to the events that happened there, giving the storyteller rhetorical power over an informed audience. In both Western Apache and ancient Southwest Asian narrative, naming and renaming shape identity. The name "Shechem" (שכם; *šekem*) literally means "shoulder," the load-bearing part of the body, which sometimes includes the back of the neck (Gen 9:23, 21:14, 24:15, 45; Exod 12:34; Josh 4:5; Judg 9:48; 1 Sam 9:2, 10:9, 23; Job 31:22). In addition to being an anatomical term, *šekem* also has strong connotations of servitude and oppression (Gen 49:15; Job 31:36; Psa 81:6; Isa 10:27, 14:25; Zeph 3:9), and is used figuratively in Isaiah to represent the

[32]In the Amarna Letters (*EA* 252–254; c.1355 BCE), Lab'ayu, ruler of Shechem, vassal of Egypt, writes "Moreover, the king wrote for my son. I did not know that my son was consorting with the Apiru. I herewith hand him over to Addaya" (*EA* 254). See "Letter of Lab'ayu of Shechem (šakmu) (*EA* 253–254)," trans. William Moran (*COS* 3.92F–G:241–242). Edward Fay Campbell, Jr., *The Chronology of the Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1964).
[33]Lewis, "Baal-Berîth," 551.
[34]Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land*, 111.
[35] In this article, I use the designation "ancient Southwest Asia(n)" in lieu of the more common designation "ancient Near East(ern)" in support of a move in scholarship to use alternatives to Western-oriented language by opting for a geographically neutral term.

responsibility of rule (Isa 9:4–6, 22:22; cf. 1 Kings 12:1, 25; 2 Chron 10:1). Given Shechem's history of subservience, whether it be to Egypt according to the Amarna Letters (*EA* 252–254), or to Israel according to biblical sources (Gen 34:1–35:5; 48:22; Josh 24), such connotations of servitude are not surprising. In light of this etymology, I would like to suggest a related connotation, one that brings Shechem's covenant history into the foreground.

The Treaty of Aššur-nerari V with Mati'-ilu, King of Arpad (c. 750 BCE), an Aramaic city-state north of Aleppo, has remarkable affinities with other Aramaic treaties found at Sefire, also near Aleppo, made between Mati'-ilu and a pseudonymous overlord, "Bar-ga'yah of KTK" (*KAI* 222–224).[36] Parpola and Watanabe point out that, "all of the few extant treaty clauses in [the treaty] find a parallel in the Sefire treaties . . . and all the clauses extant only in Sefire would comfortably fit in the breaks of our text."[37] This suggests that treaties were written in a highly formulaic manner, which, in turn, suggests that the contents of treaty oaths and stipulations were well known in the political life of the many lesser powers that established treaties with the Assyrian Empire. In one oath taken by a lesser power, the swearer substitutes themself for a sacrificial lamb:

> This shoulder is not the shoulder of a spring lamb, it is the shoulder of Mati'-ilu, it is the shoulder of his so[ns, his magnates, and the people of his land. If Mati'-ilu] should sin against this [treaty], so may, just as the shou[lder of this spring lamb] is torn out and [placed in...], the shoulder of Mati'-ilu, of his sons, [his magnates] and the people of his land be torn out and [placed] in [...][38]

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[36] Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, SAA II (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988), xxvii–xxviii. When addressing both the *Treaty of Aššur-nerari V with Mati'-ilu, King of Arpad* and the Sefire treaties, I will use the designation "Mati'-ilu texts".

[37] Parpola and Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, xxviii.

[38] Parpola and Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, 9.

Such substitutionary language is found in all the Mati'-ilu texts. Additionally, the idiom "to cut a covenant" is found throughout the Sefire treaties (*gzr 'dy'*; *KAI* 222), the Hebrew Bible (*krt bryt*; cf. Gen 15) and a Phoenician incantation from Arslan Tash (*krt ln*; *KAI* 27), and is familiar to the Assyrians who were party to the Mati'-ilu treaties.[39] Here I reiterate Lewis' statement that "every fragment of Shechemite tradition which has come down to us refers to some type of treaty."[40] The pervasiveness of covenant in the history of Shechem in combination with the motif of likening one's own body (and that of one's sons, magnates and people) to that of the covenantal sacrifice suggests that the name Shechem*,* "shoulder," may refer to the city's perpetual covenantal relationship to a greater power.

However, these agreements do not end well for Shechem. Just as the shoulder is torn from the spring lamb, so is Shechem, "(the) shoulder," son of Hamor, cut down due to an ill-formed alliance (Gen 34). As the shoulder is torn from the lamb, so too are the Shechemites, citizens of "(the) shoulder," destroyed because they make an agreement in bad faith (Judg 9:16–20, 39–49) and deal treacherously with Abimelech, their king (9:23). Thus, the covenantal aspect of stories related to Shechem is foretold not only in its history, but also by its name, which connotes servitude through covenant to a greater power.

Be'alim, Ba'alê-šekem and Political Alliance

> [33]As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Ba'al-berît their god. [34]And the people of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side,

[39]Frank Moore Cross, Jr., *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 266; cf. 236 n.78; Frank Moore Cross, Jr. and Richard J. Saley, "Phoenician Incantations on a Plaque of the Seventh Century B.C. from Arslan Tash in Upper Syria," *BASOR* 197 (1970), 42–49.
[40]Lewis, "Baal-Berîth," 551.

> [35]and they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel. (Judg 8:33–35)

The identity of Ba'al-Berît, "Lord of the Covenant," has long occupied scholarly discussion of these verses; however, the identity of Ba'al-Berît is not the only elusive one here. How can Israel be accused of both polytheism (i.e., "whoring after the Baals") *and* choosing a particular god (i.e., Ba'al-Berît) in the same breath? That is, who are the *be'alim* Israel pursues?

The term *be'alim* itself is ambiguous and can mean one of three things. The most widely adopted interpretation of Judg 8:33 takes *be'alim* as referring to manifestations of the Canaanite storm deity, Ba'al.[41] John Day lists nineteen manifestations of Ba'al mentioned in the Hebrew Bible tied to specific geographic locations, not including the various epithets of Ba'al scattered throughout biblical and Ugaritic texts.[42] This interpretation is also popular because the book of Judges uses this exact form in four other places (2:11; 3:7; 10:6, 10), all of which elaborate on what the author means by *be'alim*, either by pairing *be'alim* with *ashtarot,* manifestations of Ba'al's female consort (2:13; 3:7; 10:6), or explaining which deities Israel was pursuing (2:12; 10:6, 13–14). However, there is no such elaboration in 8:33–35. If Israel is "whoring after the Ba'als" in the sense that they pursue several manifestations of Ba'al, then it is counter-intuitive to specify that a particular Ba'al, Ba'al-Berît, has been chosen as the deity.

The second meaning *be'alim* can adopt is "chief citizens," which is favored among modern commentators.[43] The term *be'alim* in construct form (*ba'alê*) occurs in Hebrew, Aramaic and Phoenician in the expression "citizens of GN," such as Jericho (Josh 24:11), Shechem (Judg 9:2, 3, 6, 7, 18, 20), Gibeah

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[41] E.g., K. Lawson Younger, *Judges, Ruth: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 279–280; Mark S. Smith and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judges 1: A Commentary on Judges 1:1–10:5*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortess Press, 2021), 578.
[42]John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, JSOTSupp 265 (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2000), 68–69.
[43] E.g., Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, NICOT (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 2012), 270.

(Judg 20:5), Keilah (1 Sam 23:11–12), Jabesh-Gilead (2 Sam 21:12), Arpad and *KTK* (*KAI* 222), and Sidon (*KAI* 60:6).[44] Wherever this meaning is designated in the Hebrew Bible, it refers to the inhabitants of a land or city that is in conflict with the protagonist. Thus, the six-fold mention of *ba'alê-šekem* (9:2, 3, 6, 7, 18, 20) foreshadows the conflict between Abimelech and Shechem well before the deity sends an evil spirit between the two parties (9:23).

There is a third possible meaning of *be'alim,* albeit a rare one, that may inform one's reading of Judg 8:33. In Gen 14:13, Mamre the Amorite is mentioned as an ally of Abram. The term most often translated "allies" is *ba'alê berit,* literally "owners" or "lords of a covenant."[45] Hence, the term *be'alim* may also be related to a covenant partner, an ally through mutual agreement, that may belong to a different people group.

On analogy with Gen 14:13, it is possible that the *be'alim* Israel pursues are not manifestations of the deity Ba'al or chief citizens but are instead non-Israelite political allies. This is further suggested by two contrasts set up in Judg 8:33–35: 1) between the Israelites making Ba'al-Berît their god (8:33) and forgetting Yahweh (8:35) and 2) between whoring after *be'alim* and forsaking the family of Jerubbaal/Gideon (8:34).[46] Though Israel is often admonished for forgetting Yahweh and pursuing other gods, this is the only instance in the book of Judges where Israel is faulted for ignoring the descendants of a former judge. Instead of allying with one another and dispossessing the Canaanites (Deut 12:2–3, 30; 31:3–4; 33:27), the Israelites pursue peaceful relations with *be'alim*, covenant partners from non-Israelite populations (Judg 3:1–6). Abimelech pursues these relations through a king-subject relationship.

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[44]"Request for Letter of Recommendation (First Draft)," trans. Bezalel Porten (*COS* 3.51:125–30), n.111. See also Smith and Bloch-Smith, *Judges 1*, 594.

[45]Theodore J. Lewis, "The Identity and Function of El/Baal Berith," *JBL* 115 (1996):413. The cognate of the Northwest Semitic term *b'l* in Akkadian is *bēlu*, meaning "master, ruler" or "owner." This term can be applied to regular citizens, officials, or divinities. See CAD 3:191–199.

[46] On the conflict between Yahwism and Baalism in this story, see Wolfgang Bluedorn, *Yahweh Versus Baalism: A Theological Reading of the Gideon-Abimelech Narrative*, JSOTSup 329 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

Ba'al/El-Berit and the Temple at Shechem

No examination of covenant in Judg 8:30–9:57 would be complete without addressing the function of Ba'al/El-Berit, "Lord/God of Covenant," and the temple at Shechem (8:33; 9:4, 46). Archaeologists at Shechem have unearthed a monumental building dating from LBA to IA1 (1550–1000 BCE) that is widely interpreted as a temple, likely the premier religious center of the highlands.[47] Lawrence Stager observes that there is a remarkable correlation between biblical descriptions of sacred architecture and the edifice of Temple 1 (T1).[48] The building itself was made of mud-brick and timber (Judg 9:15; cf. 1 Kings 5) with a large open air altar of earth and stone (Josh 8:30–31) and three *matsebot*, one major and two minor, that flanked either side of the temple entrance (Deut 11:29; 27:1–8; Josh 8:32; 24:25–26).[49] This complex was destroyed c.1100 BCE, and there is no evidence that this sacred area was ever used as such again.[50]

Although there is much speculation concerning the relationship between the Israelite deity (Gen 33:20), the biblical text, and T1, it is clear that DH understood El-Berit as parallel with Ba'al, rendering the temple illicit in DH's eyes.[51] Furthermore, a Hurrian hymn to El (*KTU* 1.128) provides the epithets "God of the Covenant" (*'il brt*) and "El/god, the Judge" (*'il dn*; Judg 11:27), clearly placing El-Berit in a Canaanite context.[52]

But what is the nature of the relationship between El-Berit and the citizens of Shechem? What does the designation El-Berit, "God of the

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[47] Stager, "The Fortress-Temple." For an interpretation of the complex as a palace, see Lawrence E. Toombs, "Temple or Palace: A Reconsideration of the Shechem 'Courtyard Temple,'" in *Put Your Future in Ruins: Essays in Honor of Robert Jehu Bull*, ed. Henry O. Thompson (Bristol: Wyndham Hall, 1985), 42–60.

[48] Stager, "The Fortress-Temple," 245.

[49] Stager, "The Fortress-Temple," 229–233. Compare with temple construction described in "The Sippar Cylinder of Nabonidus," trans. Paul-Alain Beaulieu (*COS* 2.123: 310–312).

[50] Stager, "The Fortress Temple," 230–232; G. Ernest Wright, *Shechem: The Biography of a Biblical City* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 145.

[51] Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 1–75 (44); S. David Sperling, *The Original Torah: The Political Intent of the Bible's Writers* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 68. On the debate as to whether it was Baal or El who was the chief deity of Shechem, see Smith and Bloch-Smith, *Judges 1*, 598–600.

[52] Cross, "The Religion of Canaan and the God of Israel," 39.

Covenant," add to our understanding of covenant at Shechem and the story of Abimelech? There are two possible functions of the deity in covenantal agreements. The first, which is better attested in ancient Southwest Asia, is the role of a witness. Most ancient Southwest Asian treaties conclude by naming several gods, often the gods of both parties, as witnesses.[53] The second option is that the deity is a covenant party, a relatively undeveloped concept during Iron Age 1. The phrase *ba'alê-berît,* lords/owners of the covenant, appears in Gen 14:13 in reference to Abram's *human* allies, but is not used to describe a divine covenant. However, there is extra-biblical evidence that suggests that El-Berit at Shechem was indeed a covenant partner, not a witness.[54]

Outside the Hebrew Bible, the clearest attestations of the divine entering into covenant relationship with a human community occur in two of the texts mentioned above—the Arslan Tash incantation (*KAI* 27) and the Hurrian hymn to El (*KTU* 1.128). The former speaks of Aššur and numerous lesser deities establishing "an eternal covenant" with the people; and the latter, the same Hurrian hymn which mentions *'il brt*, is the only known example of a single deity being involved in a covenant agreement.[55]

The divine-human covenant in the Arslan Tash inscription and the singularity of El-Berit in the Hurrian hymn suggest that Shechem, established by Hamor *the Hurrian* (Gen 34:2, LXX), had entered a covenant with El-Berit and served as his vassal.[56] Furthermore, if El-Berit is a covenant party and not a witness, then Abimelech covenants himself, not only to the *ba'alê-šekem*, but also to El-Berit (Judg 9:4–6). Thus, the two contrasts in Judg 8:33–35, between the Israelites making Ba'al-Berît their god (8:33) and forgetting Yahweh (8:35), and between pursuing *be'alim* and forsaking the family of

[53]One example is the Treaty of Aššur-nerari V with Mati'-ilu, King of Arpad mentioned above. See Parpola and Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, 13.
[54]For a full discussion, see Lewis, "Identity and Function of El/Baal-Berîth," 404–411.
[55]Lewis, "Identity and Function of El/Baal-Berîth," 408–410.
[56]No note in BHS. See LXX and Daniel J. Harrington, "Biblical Geography in Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum,*" in *Essays in Honor of George Ernest Wright*, eds. Edward F. Campbell and Robert G. Boling (Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1975), 67–75 (68a).

Jerubbaal/Gideon (8:34) are both embodied in the character Abimelech, revealing his religious and political sins, respectively.

The Men of Hamor, Covenant and "Killing the Ass"

> [28]And Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who is Abimelech, and who are we of Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is not Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? [29] Would that this people were under my hand! Then I would remove Abimelech. I would say to Abimelech, 'Increase your army, and come out.'" (Judg 9:28–29)

Gaal's appeal to Hamor (חמר, *hamor*), Shechem's founder, has great import for the discussion of covenant in Judg 9. Hamor is first mentioned as the man whose sons, one of whom is Shechem, sell a plot of land to Jacob (Gen 33:19). In Judg 9:28, Gaal mentions Hamor to strengthen his rhetoric against Abimelech by appealing to the genealogical, tribal pride of the *ba'alê-šekem,* convincing them to overthrow their half-blood king. However, the effectiveness of Gaal's imperative "Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem" is ironic in light of the literal meanings of *hamor* and *šekem.* As previously discussed, *šekem* means "shoulder" and bears connotations of servitude through covenant to a greater power. The name *hamor* translates as "donkey" or "ass," a beast of burden that was domesticated in Africa in the fourth millennium BCE and spread quickly throughout ancient Southwest Asia, making it the most common equid in the region.[57] Gaal's imperative to "Serve the men of the beast of burden, the father of the indentured" loses its grandeur when put in these terms and portrays the *ba'alê-šekem* who conspire against Abimelech as *servants* by heritage, not the elite.

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[57] "Lærke Recht: The agency of animals," *Thin Edge of the Wedge Podcast*, 3 Aug 2022, http://www.wedgepod.org/episode-list/; see also Lærke Recht, *The Spirited Horse: Equid-Human Relations in The Bronze Age Near East* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 45-49.

Mention of Hamor in Judg 9:28 also evokes the memory of Gen 34, where the sons of Hamor (33:19; 34:2) are destroyed due to an ill-informed agreement with the sons of Jacob. Thus, Shechem's destruction is both foretold by the typological nature of Gen 34, previously discussed, and foreshadowed by Gaal's appeal to the ill-fated Hamor.[58]

The naming of Hamor also has a covenantal aspect. Throughout MBA-LBA (2000–1550 BCE), there is archaeological and textual evidence for donkey sacrifice as a means of sealing covenants and rectifying relationships. At Mari, "killing an ass/donkey" was synonymous with "making a treaty" or "making peace."[59] Donkeys were used for the heaviest work and held in high esteem, so they were not sacrificed regularly.[60] This is corroborated by the data available from Ugarit, where donkey sacrifice makes up less than 1% of all animal offerings.[61]

There are six copies of a ritual text found at Ugarit that prescribes donkey sacrifice for the reparation of relationships, suggesting that, although the rite was rarely carried out, it was of great importance and perhaps well-known.[62] The sacrifice comes at the end of a three-fold ritual that seeks to establish communion between people groups and deities, expiate sin and rectify human and divine relationships.[63] The animal is referred to as "the donkey of rectitude (*'r mšr*): rectitude of the son of Ugarit: and[well-being of the foreigner within the walls]," emphasizing the cohesive nature of the ritual.[64]

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[58]Geller, "The Sack of Shechem," 2–3.
[59]Stephanie Dalley, *Mari and Karana: Two Old Babylonian Cities* (London: Longman, 1984), 140–141.
[60]Dalley, *Mari and Karana*, 156–157. cf. Exod 13:13, 34:20; Ezra 2:66; Theodore J. Lewis, "Covenant and Blood Rituals: Understanding Exodus 24:3–8 in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context," Pages 341–50 in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*, eds. Seymour Gitin et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 348.
[61]Lewis, "Covenant and Blood Rituals," 348.
[62]Dennis Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit,* SBLWAW 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 77–78.
[63]Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit*, 78.
[64]Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit*, 82.

Skeletal remains of slaughtered donkeys have also been found throughout ancient Southwest Asia, possibly including Shechem. In the inner chamber of the LBA (1550–1200 BCE) gate tower at Shechem lay a "fully articulated, but decapitated, skeleton of an equine," possibly a donkey.[65] It is uncertain whether this animal was a foundation sacrifice, as Toombs suggests, or a casualty of the destruction that ended Stratum XIII.[66] However, there are similar burials in two other places. In front of the temple at Avaris, in the Nile Delta, were two large pits, each containing a pair of donkeys. At Tel Haror, in Philistine territory, the temple courtyard had many sacred pits filled with ritually slaughtered animals, including donkeys. [67] Although these comparisons are enticing, the skeletal remains at Shechem remain inconclusive. However, "they *may* underscore a long-standing association of Shechemite religion and covenant terminology."[68]

Whether or not the remains of the equid at Shechem are from a sacrificial donkey, the mention of Hamor echoes an ancient, covenantal past based on rectitude and servitude. Gen 49, one of the Hebrew Bible's archaic poems, combines the image of a donkey (*hamor*) bending its shoulder (*šekem*) with ideas of recompense and voluntary servitude (49:14–15).[69]

> *Issachar* ["there shall be *recompense*"] is a rawboned *ass* (*hamor*),
> Crouched amidst saddlebags.
> When he saw how good was the homestead,
> And how very pleasant the country,
> He bent down his *shoulder* (*šekem*) to burdens
> And became a *willing serf*.[70]

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[65]Edward F. Campbell, *Shechem III: The Stratigraphy and Architecture of Shechem/Tell Balâtah*, ASOR Archaeological Reports 6, 2 vols. (Boston: ASOR, 2002), 1:173.
[66]Toombs, "Shechem," 1182; Campbell, *Shechem III*, 1:173.
[67]Stager, "The Fortress-Temple at Shechem," 238.
[68]Lewis, "The Identity and Function of El/Baal Berîth," 413.
[69]On the antiquity of Gen 49, see E.A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 370–371.
[70] Emphasis added. Translation from Speiser, *Genesis*, 362.

Thus, notions of rectification and servitude elicited by the names *hamor* and *šekem* are connected early in Israel's history, in one of its earliest traditions. These associations have reverberated through the centuries, shaping how Judg 8:30–9:57 was composed and might be understood.

Covenant Curse and Termination

As the references and allusions to Shechem's covenant past have foreshadowed, the story of Shechem and Abimelech ends tragically. The difference between this ill-fated agreement and earlier agreements with Shechem is the fact that *both* parties are destroyed. Furthermore, they are destroyed in accordance with ancient Southwest Asian covenant curses and the statutes of Yahweh.

After dividing his people into three companies and setting an ambush against Shechem, "Abimelech fought against the city all that day. He captured the city and killed the people who were in it, and he razed the city and sowed it with salt" (Judg 9:45). Abimelech discovers that the "leaders of the Tower of Shechem" are hiding in the temple of El-Berit, so he goes to Mount Zalmon, cuts a bundle of brushwood and directs his men to do the same. They pile brush against the stronghold and set it on fire "so that all the people of the Tower of Shechem also died, about 1,000 men and women" (Judg 9:49), thus fulfilling Jotham's prediction that if the Shechemites made Abimelech king in bad faith, fire would come out of him and consume them (Judg 9:20).

Sowing salt, which renders the land infertile, is a common punishment for covenant violation in ancient Southwest Asia.[71] When vassals rebel against their overlords or subjects deface the stele of the king, the king conquers that land and salts it to prevent resettlement.[72] One of the Sefire treaties between

[71] Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 109–112; Wright, *Shechem*, 21.
[72] "Proclamation of Anitta of Kuššar," trans. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. (*COS* 1.72:182–184),183 and "The Bukan Inscription," trans. K. Lawson Younger (*COS* 3.89:219).

Mati'-ilu and Bar-ga'yah combines burning with sowing salt, stipulating that if Mati'-ilu transgresses this agreement, "Just as this wax is burned by fire, so may Arpad be burned and [her gr]eat [daughter-cities]! May Hadad sow in them salt and weeds (?), and may it not be mentioned (again)! This GNB' and [ ] (are) Mati'el; it is his person. Just as the wax is burned by fire, so may Mati['el be burned by fi]re!"[73]

The covenantal curses of burning and sowing salt are also juxtaposed in Deuteronomy. When the anger of Yahweh burns against he who disregards his covenant, Yahweh singles him out "for calamity, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant" (Deut 29:21). When the next generation or foreigner arises, they will inquire about "the whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing growing" (Deut 29:23). Like Yahweh, Abimelech burns the unfaithful city and sows salt in its fields in accordance with ancient Southwest Asian and biblical covenant curses.

The complete destruction of "*all* the people of the Tower of Shechem . . . about 1,000 men and women" (Judg 9:49) is not a covenant curse in the sense that this fate is promised to one who transgresses an agreement, but it is one of the stipulations of Israel's covenant with Yahweh. Deuteronomy states that if Israel approaches a foreign city and it refuses to make peace, Israel shall besiege it. If it is a far-off land, only the men are killed and the rest is spoil, "but in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes" (Deut 20:16). Thus, Abimelech destroys Shechem, male and female, according to both covenant curses and the instructions of Yahweh for dealing with hostile Canaanite cities. However, he does not escape the deity's wrath for the slaying of his 70 brothers. Instead, his evil is returned literally upon his head, when a woman drops a millstone on him during the battle at Thebez (Judg 9:16–10, 23–24, 56–57).

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[73] "The Inscriptions of Bar-ga'yah and Mati'el from Sefire," trans. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. (*COS* 2.82:213-217), 214. The destruction of daughter-cities may shed light on Abimelech's reason for attacking Thebez.

With all these lessons and associations added to the name Shechem, the DH later speaks with the name again, when Rehoboam is coronated at Shechem (1 Kgs 12:1) only to fracture the kingdom almost immediately. Shechem is then rebuilt by the infamous golden calf builder, Jeroboam, who resides there (9:25), harkening back to the long history of non-Yahwistic worship that characterizes Shechem (Gen 35:2–4; Judg 8:33–35) and thus foreshadowing the fact that the northern kingdom's story does not end well.

Speaking with Names in Judges 8:30–9:57

Long before the Israelites enter the land of Canaan, Yahweh commands Israel to drive out all the people who currently live there and warns, "those of them whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land where you dwell" (Num 33:55). If a city is hostile toward the Israelites, it is to be destroyed completely (Deut 20:10–18). Knowledge of Shechem's bloody covenantal past leads the audience to interpret Judg 8:30–9:57 as a social warning against making any kind of agreement with the unconquered Canaanites, even if the Canaanites are the ones being subjugated. Going back to Basso's ethnographic study of Western Apache place names, Shechem is a particularly good city to use as an arrow in this instance because of its history and the connotation of its name. In Judg 8:30–9:57, what started off as a sexual partnership between an Israelite man and his Shechemite *pilegeš* developed into a massacre of that man's 70 sons, an ill-informed alliance between his half-blood son and the Canaanites of Shechem and the death and destruction of an entire city.

Shechem's history of unsettling political relations and fractured agreements repeats itself in the story of Abimelech. Jacob and Abimelech both intend to establish peaceful relations with Shechem, and both of their plans are thwarted by others, Jacob's sons or, in Abimelech's case, the deity (Gen 34:25; Judg 9:23). In contrast with Gen 34, in which Jacob and his descendants possess Shechem, as a result of their spoiled agreement (Gen 48:22; Josh 24:32), the story of Abimelech does not end in victory for either party. The

deity destroys the Shechemites and Abimelech, who is the only Israelite killed by the deity in the book of Judges and, perhaps not coincidentally, the only ruler chosen by popular demand rather than Yahweh (Judg 9:1–3, 16–20, 23–24, 56–57).

The repetition of this place name is designed to evoke wisdom that enables the audience "to foresee disaster, fend off misfortune, and avoid explosive conflicts with other persons."[74] Like Western Apache storytellers, the narrator of Abimelech's story "exploit[s] the evocative power of place-names to comment on the moral conduct of persons" in the past, present and future.[75] The author's historical message is that relationships with the Shechemites specifically and the Canaanites broadly have always failed in the past, continue to fail today, will continue to fail in the future, and therefore should be avoided. The author uses place-making as a literary device that constructs the past in a way that not only promotes a particular way of life or social tradition but also forges personal and social identities through self-reflection. Speaking with the name "Shechem" shoots an arrow at whomever needs to hear the narrator's message but also reinforces a sense of community among those with the knowledge necessary to draw wisdom from the mere mention of its name.

Of course, the message of maintaining social boundaries such as those between Israelite and Canaanite reinforces a particular kind of personal and social identity, one based on ethnic distinction and cultural practice. This ethnic identity is sustained through self-reflection. An "insider/outsider" or "us v. them" mentality forces one group to define themselves over and against another, thus forging their own identity and that of the other in the process. When the narrator's audience is knowledgeable about Shechem's history, able to hear what is spoken with the city's name and attentive to the incoming arrow, the repository of ancestral knowledge is effectively accessed, and

[74] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 131.
[75] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 80.

identity is forged or reinforced. In Basso's analysis of Western Apache narrative, he notes that when a story is fused with prominent elements of personal and ethnic identity, "its social and moral force may reach sacramental proportions." [76] The scripturalization of the politically and ethnically charged story of Abimelech and Shechem attests to the transcultural quality of Basso's observation.

Conclusion

The author of Judg 8:30–9:57 speaks with names to elicit the memory of a bloody covenantal past, a memory that foreshadows the conflict between king and subject and the tragic fate of Shechem, destroyed according to covenant curses and the instructions of Yahweh for dealing with a hostile Canaanite city. The author elicits this memory through his use of the terms *be'alim* and *ba'alê-šekem* and the proper names Shechem, Ba'al/El-Berit, and Hamor. These nouns also illuminate Abimelech's political and religious wrongdoings, which are in line with the two contrasts established in the narrative's prelude: 1) between the Israelites making Ba'al-Berit their god and forgetting Yahweh, and 2) between whoring after *be'alim* and forsaking the family of Jerubbaal/Gideon (Judg 8:33–35). Once Abimelech kills his 70 brothers, he is able to establish a king-subject relationship with Shechem (Judg 9:4–6), a relationship that goes against the Deuteronomic imperative to dispossess the Canaanites (Deut 12:2–3, 30; 31:3–4; 33:27) and entails a covenantal relationship with the Canaanite deity, El-Berit. Although Abimelech acts in accordance with the statutes of Deuteronomy when he destroys Shechem, he is not forgiven for killing his brothers. The deity returns Abimelech's evil upon him at the hands of a woman and his legacy is that of a fool (2 Sam 11:21).

Basso's ethnographic observations regarding Western Apache place-making provides the reader of the story of Abimelech and Shechem with an insightful interpretive lens that allows one to tap into Shechem as a repository

[76] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 148.

of generations of wisdom. Basso's hunch that "sense of place is a universal genre of experience [that]. . . may be found to exhibit transcultural qualities" is supported by comparison of the Western Apache sense of place to that of the narrator of Judg 8:30–9:57.[77] Both cultures perform the act of place-making and, in turn, speak with those place names in order to shoot an arrow, to wound the target of their criticism in hopes of bringing about self-reflection that leads to wisdom, healing and a more conscientious future.

[77] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 148.