Delivering Textual Diaspora: Building Digital Cultural Repositories as Rhetoric Research

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INTRODUCTION

Although scholars in the digital humanities are increasingly interested in the rhetorical task of tailoring their digital resources to the needs of multiple stakeholder audiences, little work has been done to investigate how this effort may, in turn, produce new research questions for scholars interested in rhetoric and rhetorical historiography. This essay explores the dispersal of Samaritan manuscripts as a challenge for digital and rhetorical scholars. I coin and introduce the term *textual diaspora* to account for the strategic ways that Samaritan Elders talk about the potential of diaspora manuscripts to communicate their existence and cultural identity.1

The Samaritans, one of the smallest religious and ethnic communities in the Middle East today, number only 760. Though they numbered in the hundreds of thousands in the Roman period and are legendary for the Parable of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke 10:29-37, today they have just two centers of population: Kiryat Luza on Mt. Gerizim next to the ancient West Bank city of Nablus (also known in Hebrew as Shechem) and the small Samaritan neighborhood of Holon, Israel. Kiryat Luza is defined as area “B” under the 1993 Oslo Accords, or Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, as territory governed by Palestinian Authority civil administration and joint Israeli-Palestinian security administration (Newman 61). This geographic reality situates the Samaritans squarely in the midst of the contemporary Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Given their small number, one might be surprised at the reach of the Samaritans’ cultural

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heritage, yet the majority of their manuscripts are housed in libraries, collections, and museums across the world.

This essay is based on the work that developed from a 2008–9 project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Office of Digital Humanities, “Archive 2.0: Imagining the Michigan State University Israelite Samaritan Scrolls Collection as a Thriving Social Network,” which aimed to digitize and provide tailored access to the dispersed Samaritan manuscripts.2 It considers some of the complexities of digitization not from a purely technical or institutional policy standpoint, but from a rhetorical perspective. In this essay, I examine three Samaritan Elders’ complex reactions to digitizing their manuscripts, and discuss how the manuscripts and the Elders’ responses may be understood as an important research problem for scholars interested in rhetorical historiography and the digital humanities. I use the term textual diaspora to describe how some Samaritan Elders are strategically talking about their diaspora of manuscripts and its digitization as an issue of rhetorical sovereignty (Lyons). The concept evolves from my earlier work on rhetorical velocity and strategizing the future potential of texts, and from my fieldwork with the Samaritans themselves. Although the concept of rhetorical velocity is a framework for rhetoricians to consider the possibilities of “composing [a text] for strategic recomposition,” textual diaspora centers on how to strategically leverage texts that have been already circulated or delivered (Ridolfo and DeVoss).3

The concept of textual diaspora situates the past, present, and future of texts in relationship to the changing rhetorical goals and the particular objectives of cultural stakeholders.4 Theorizing the digital delivery of textual diaspora creates a double linkage between how texts came to be where they are and how they will be used in the future. Making this connection explicit offers productive ways to understand rhetorical historiography and delivery as interrelated aspects of a text’s movement in time and across culture. The Samaritans, I argue, make a compelling rhetorical case that their manuscripts abroad should be preserved and digitized. This message is a useful heuristic for understanding the potential relationship of rhetorical historiography to the digital humanities. Additionally, while thinking about the strategic importance of texts for the Samaritans in relationship to their circulation—what the texts do in relationship to their movement and present location—has particular significance for rhetorical theory, textual diaspora also offers a framework for English studies to think about the activity of texts in relationship to their content.

**Project Background**

Before I can fully explain how I came to understand and theorize the complex relationship of Samaritans to their diasporic texts, it is important to know more about how I learned about their diaspora of texts and how this diaspora of texts was cre-
ated. In 1982, Samaritan Elder Benyamim Tsedaka began traveling from his home in the Samaritan neighborhood of Holon, Israel, to visit libraries and museums with Samaritan collections in Europe and North America, and to experience, firsthand, the Samaritans’ diaspora of manuscripts.\(^5\) As one of the first Samaritan Elders to extensively travel to these collections, his first few trips included visits to Columbia University, the Annenberg Institute at the University of Pennsylvania, the Library of Congress, and Michigan State University (MSU). During his visit to MSU, Tsedaka saw the Chamberlain Warren Samaritan Collection of manuscripts for the first time and set in motion the events that would eventually lead to this article. Over the next two decades, Tsedaka returned to MSU to visit his people’s manuscripts and cultural heritage.\(^6\)

On Tsedaka’s visit to MSU in November 2003, he did something different from previous trips. Learning that a board of trustees meeting was scheduled for that day, Tsedaka attended the meeting, and at the “Public Participation on Issues Not Germane to the Agenda,” he stood to address MSU’s trustees about the MSU Chamberlain Warren Samaritan Collection. The meeting notes record that Tsedaka introduced and explained some basic facts about himself and his people, specifically that he was a descendant of the ancient Northern Israelite Kingdom. According to the meeting notes, he then explained to the trustees that “MSU received one of the largest collections in the world of Samaritan manuscripts; they are located in the Library.” On behalf of his people, Tsedaka made a request, and “encouraged the University to utilize this collection to promote Samaritan Studies” (Michigan State University Board of Trustees). Nine years later, Tsedaka recalls that the November 2003 meeting “was fun. They were giving time for people to ask questions, so I utilized it to the best of my ability. Telling them about [. . .] [my idea for a] Samaritan corner [. . .] [that they should] have a Samaritan corner” in the main library (Personal interview 28 June 2012).\(^7\)

Four years later, in December 2007, I discovered the finding aid to the MSU Chamberlain Warren collection. I was curious about the collection, and a quick Google search led me first to Robert Anderson’s article “The Museum Trail: The Michigan State University Samaritan Collection,” which details the history of the MSU collection; and then, a few hours later, I discovered Tsedaka’s November 2003 board of trustees address. After reading the meeting notes and Tsedaka’s request to do something with the collection, I searched to see if MSU had responded to Tsedaka; I found no evidence that they had. I did, however, find Tsedaka’s email address, and a few days later I wrote to him:

I am interested in potentially digitizing some or all of the three Pentateuch texts in the collection, and making them available online off msu.edu [. . .] for educators, researchers, and your own Samaritan community. I wanted to know if first and foremost such an endeavor is respectful of your culture’s values regarding these texts. I
am aware that these are sacred texts, and I would not proceed with such an endeavor unless it honors the values of your people. Any feedback you could give would be greatly appreciated. (Ridolfo)

Tsedaka responded almost immediately with his support for a digitization project:

In regards to the question you have asked. 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. (“Re: Hello”)

Over the next five years, I worked, and continue to work, with Tsedaka to digitize Samaritan manuscripts at MSU and Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati (HUC-JIR). At the very beginning of the project, my initial and most simplistic understanding of the work ahead was that we would be digitizing Samaritan manuscripts and making them electronically available to members of the Samaritan community as well as to biblical and Samaritan scholars. However, the process was much more complicated than that.

What I did not know in December 2007, and subsequently learned through fieldwork with the community, was the size, scope, and underlying colonial and economic reasons behind the Samaritan diaspora of manuscripts. During the next few years, as the digitization project moved forward, the cause and history of the manuscript diaspora became more significant to me as a researcher, and I began to look at how this history of manuscript removal relates to the rhetorical future of the digital repository. In order to build the digital repository, my co-PI William Hart-Davidson and I needed to understand the conditions and histories that made it possible for 4,000 Samaritan manuscripts to leave Samaritan hands and spread out across four continents. To do so, we gained a rich sense of the needs of stakeholders and a deep understanding of the specific delivery needs of these communities. I learned more about the rhetorical significance of this diaspora, and my increased knowledge of the complex history surrounding the Samaritans and their manuscripts enabled me to theorize the digital repository project and the Samaritans’ textual diaspora.

**Groundwork for Digitization: Identifying Stakeholders**

In 2008 Hart-Davidson and I assembled a team that included Tsedaka, MSU Special Collections staff, Samaritan and biblical scholars, the university archivist, and programming talent from MSU’s Writing in Digital Environments (WIDE) Research Center. In the beginning, we were focused primarily on the MSU Chamberlain Warren collection, and we began by identifying three distinct stakeholder communities, each with a different set of interests in the collection. First, there is the living Samaritan community in Israel and the West Bank, or what we call **cultural**
stakeholders. For this group of then 700 Samaritans, the manuscripts in libraries abroad represent a significant chapter of their cultural history. The second stakeholder group includes more than 70 Samaritan and thousands of biblical scholars with a general interest in Samaritan manuscripts. The third group of stakeholders includes MSU librarians and archivists, or what we call institutional stakeholders. Although these three communities of stakeholders are interested in enhancing access to the collection for their own unique reasons and uses, in this essay I specifically focus on the archival and qualitative research required to deliver a digital repository to the Samaritan cultural stakeholder community.

For the first phase of the digital repository project, in early 2008, Hart-Davidson and I applied for and received an NEH Office of Digital Humanities Start-up Grant to research and build a prototype digital repository tailored to the needs of the Samaritan community in Holon and Mt. Gerizim with the following objectives:

• To create a working model of a culturally sensitive repository of Samaritan texts that may support a variety of learning activities including online teaching, learning, and research for members of the Samaritan community as well as scholars
• To follow a model of system development consistent with best practices of user-centered design and the movement toward community-oriented transformation of archival collections
• To adapt innovative approaches in digital technology associated with Web 2.0—especially social networking, tagging, and social bookmarking—that embody new perspectives on humanities research

For this stage of the project, our research angle was less about studying the content or literal meaning of the texts themselves, and more about understanding what specific stakeholder groups want to do with the texts in a digital environment. To this end, our team engaged in an iterative design project to understand how cultural stakeholders use texts in order to help us tailor the electronic repository to the needs of the cultural stakeholder group.

This stakeholder-based approach differs from a project such as Google’s Dead Sea Scrolls initiative where the initial goal is to provide a broader form of access to as large a public as possible. Rather than tailored access to specific stakeholder groups, Google seeks to provide “users access to searchable, fast-loading, high-resolution images of the scrolls, as well as short explanatory videos and background information on the texts and their history” (“Digital Dead Sea Scrolls”). Although the Dead Sea Scrolls may have specific Jewish and Samaritan cultural stakeholder groups, our work differs from Google’s in the respect that we are interested in researching how to tailor cultural digital repositories to the needs of specific stakeholder groups. In turn, this stakeholder-based lens produces tailored interfaces and, as I will show later, encourages qualitative research into the particular cultural and historical situation of access. In short, Google’s work starts from enhancing general digital
access to the content of the texts, and we begin with a focused interest in the needs of particular stakeholders as they relate to the content of their texts. For scholars of rhetoric interested in the digital humanities, I argue that this latter approach is more promising because it requires extensive research into the rhetorical needs of individual stakeholder groups.

**Researching for Future Digital Delivery**

In May 2009 I traveled with lead project software developer Michael McLeod to Mt. Gerizim as part of our iterative design testing for the MSU Samaritan repository interface, and there we met with the late Samaritan High Priest Elazar ben Tsedaka ben Yitzhaq. At the meeting, High Priest Elazar made a request that would become the basis of my next stage of research. He asked that all of the 4,000 Samaritan manuscripts around the world be digitized. Though I was visiting Mt. Gerizim at the time only to discuss the MSU digitization efforts and had no contact with the dozens of other institutions housing Samaritan manuscripts abroad, his request stuck in my mind and began to prompt additional research questions: specifically, what did Samaritan Elders want for and from their diaspora of manuscripts? I knew that this diaspora of manuscripts was significant enough to motivate Tsedaka to travel to Samaritan collections across the world, but when I returned to Michigan from Mt. Gerizim, I did not know what he or other Elders thought about the history and location of these collections, what they hoped to achieve from broad digitization, and, given the disturbing history of how many of the manuscripts had left Samaritan hands, if they wanted any of these manuscripts repatriated.

As I thought more about High Priest Elazar’s request, I was also prompted by conversations with Tsedaka and Samaritan scholar Robert Anderson to learn more about the dispersal of manuscripts. From this research into secondary literature in Samaritan studies, I learned that the first stage of manuscript emigration, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, involved European scholars deceiving the Samaritans in order to acquire their sacred manuscripts. Perhaps one of the most egregious examples of such deceit was in 1671, when British chaplain Robert Huntington visited the Samaritan community in Nablus. According to Anderson, the Samaritans were initially impressed that Huntington was able to read their manuscripts:

[The Samaritans of Nablus] inquired if there were “Israelites” in England. When Huntington affirmed that there were, they assumed that there were Samaritans in England. Huntington decided to exploit their confusion rather than correct it. Initially the ruse payed [sic] off. Huntington received at least one copy of the [Samaritan] Pentateuch. (“Samaritan History” 105)

According to Tsedaka, the Samaritans “wanted to believe that this [story] was true because it encouraged them to know that they have brothers in some other place in
the world, like London, Paris, and Germany” (Personal interview 8 June 2012). The impact of Huntington’s story reverberated for the next several hundred years. Well into the nineteenth century, the Samaritans of Nablus continued to believe that they had long-lost brothers in Europe, and European scholars continued to exploit this belief and the legacy of Huntington’s deceit.

For example, Anderson notes that in 1808, M. Corancoz wrote a letter to the Samaritans of Nablus requesting a copy of their calendar “to give to the Samaritans in France” (“Samaritan History” 107). The Samaritans, in turn, responded to requests such as these by expressing a sense of brotherhood with their nonexistent Samaritan counterparts in Europe: “I give you notice that your letter reached us, and that there has been from us much joy, and what you said was already in our hearts [. . . .] You are to us our brothers” (Sacy 101).13

Although early European instances such as these were successful in deceiving the Samaritans out of approximately forty manuscripts, the largest emigration of Samaritan manuscripts occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century when, through a series of unfortunate historical circumstances, the Samaritans’ economic desperation coincided with American and European tourism to Palestine. Tourism to Palestine brought a desire for souvenirs, and in the mid-nineteenth century the Samaritans were inundated with requests to sell their holy books. The Samaritans initially said no to European requests14 (see Wilson 74), but by the second half of the century, economic desperation forced the Samaritans of Nablus to sell manuscripts to European travelers.15 In a matter of decades, the economic pressure to sell manuscripts, combined with the limited work opportunities available to Samaritans, created a tourist industry in which Samaritan scribes produced manuscripts on paper specifically for sale to tourists. By the end of the 1920s, an estimated 4,000 Samaritan manuscripts were no longer in Samaritan hands. Instead, they were spread out across four continents in the libraries, museums, archives, and private collections of Europe, North America, Australia, and South America.16 The entire Samaritan population of 760 continues to exist in a single region today, yet their manuscripts are spread out across the world, constituting a diaspora of texts, not people.

**Digitization as Delivering Textual Diaspora**

To further my research and understanding of the textual diaspora and the implications of digitizing Samaritan manuscripts, in 2012 I received a Middle East and North Africa Regional Research Fulbright Scholarship to return to the Samaritan communities on Mt. Gerizim and Holon and conduct open-ended interviews with Elders on what their diaspora of manuscripts means to them. With the help of Tsedaka, I interviewed seven additional Elders about their diaspora of manuscripts. I was interested specifically in what they wanted from their manuscripts abroad. I
pursued questions about the relationship of the past manuscript dispersal to future digital delivery of manuscripts not only as research topics in their own right, but also as questions especially important to inform the construction of a future digital repository of Samaritan manuscripts. In what follows I present the positions of three Elders: Tsedaka, Yacop Cohen, and Menashe Altif. I have selected these three of the eight because they represent the range of positions I found in my field research, and they prompted me to consider more closely the significance of High Priest Elazar’s call to digitize all the Samaritan manuscripts abroad.

Samaritans’ relationship to their manuscripts abroad differs from Samaritan Elder to Samaritan Elder, yet these responses from Tsedaka, Cohen, and Altif should not be understood as monolithic or ahistorical, but rather as conversations situated in place and time; as such, I suggest that they provide insight into how some Samaritan Elders are talking about their diaspora of manuscripts in strategic rhetorical ways. These insights, in turn, are important to conversations about digitization because they represent a range of strategic thinking about how the textual diaspora of manuscripts may physically and digitally benefit the Samaritan people in the future.17

Together, Tsedaka, Cohen, and Altif engage in what I call theorizing textual diaspora, or strategizing the future rhetorical potential of a large diaspora of manuscripts to advance specific cultural and communicative goals or objectives. Strategizing or theorizing textual diaspora simultaneously considers the past histories of manuscript dispersal, the present political and cultural pressures, and the imagined future potential of these texts to be conserved, studied, and placed on display in brick-and-mortar institutions, and then re-cast and re-delivered in digital repositories. Although Tsedaka’s, Cohen’s, and Altif’s opinions may differ in terms of rhetorical strategy and implementation related to the physical future of the textual diaspora, the three share a deep understanding of the textual diaspora’s importance to contemporary Samaritan identity, culture, and sociopolitical circumstances.

All three Elders think that digitizing the diaspora of Samaritan manuscripts serves to forward the necessary and essential task of furthering global knowledge about the Samaritans’ existence and culture. There is, however, a diversity of opinion about how the physical location of the manuscripts may relate to the interests of place, tactile experience, and digitization. For example, Tsedaka is clear that even though the ways the manuscripts left Samaritan hands are disturbing, the manuscripts are better off today in terms of preservation and scholarly study if they remain in libraries, museums, and archives abroad: “I believe that the way the manuscripts escaped [from the Samaritans], this is better for the manuscripts. And you [researchers] can have access any time to see. In Michigan State’s Library, I’ve visited maybe 10 times [. . . .] They are keeping the manuscripts so well” (Personal interview 16 Feb. 2012). However, as Tsedaka’s 2003 address to the MSU board of trustees shows, it is not enough for Tsedaka that the textual diaspora simply be preserved or stored in libraries
and museums abroad; the manuscripts’ cultural contents must be *amplified* through scholarship, public displays, and digitization. To the goal of making the content of the manuscripts more widely accessible through digitization, Tsedaka makes a point that I saw echoed in the transcripts of all eight interviewees: it’s important for the world to know more about the Samaritans, and access to Samaritan cultural heritage is a significant rhetorical tool to help them achieve this objective. To this end, Tsedaka, Cohen, and Altif each theorize the Samaritan textual diaspora’s great potential to help achieve future rhetorical objectives.

While Tsedaka’s main tactic for textual diaspora focuses on amplification and access through digitization and other means, Cohen expresses a desire for material connection and centralization. Both leaders share a desire to harness the power of textual diaspora of the manuscripts abroad, but their ideal tactical use differs significantly. Specifically, Cohen thinks that 50 percent of the manuscripts abroad should return to Samaritan hands and be centralized on Mt. Gerizim. In centralizing the manuscripts, Cohen hopes to one day create a destination for Samaritan learning, knowledge, and study. However, he also agrees in part with Tsedaka that it is important for some manuscripts to remain abroad in order for scholars to have access (Personal interview 28 Feb. 2012).

Altif, on the other hand, wishes “that all manuscripts will return back to the hands of the Samaritan community” for reasons similar to Cohen’s. Yet he “knows that is [. . .] not possible because each manuscript costs a lot of money and the Samaritan community has not that money in order to return their manuscripts” (Personal interview 19 Apr. 2012). In response to Cohen’s and Altif’s idea for physical repatriation, Tsedaka argues that returning any large percentage of manuscripts and centralizing them on Mt. Gerizim would limit the future potential for scholars to access and do work on the collections. In turn, this geographic concentration would curtail the growth of Samaritan studies abroad. Simply because Tsedaka disagrees with repatriating the texts does not mean for him that institutions in possession of Samaritan manuscripts bear no responsibility to their collections and the Samaritan people. Rather, Samaritan Elders such as Tsedaka trust institutions abroad to preserve, provide access to, and digitize Samaritan manuscripts in order to make these collections more widely accessible.

Echoing High Priest Elazar, the three agree about the importance of and need for digitizing their textual diaspora as a means of communicating knowledge about the Samaritans to the world. For example, Tsedaka argues that it’s

> very good to digitize them—to preserve them—and also to present them in order to get interest from students [in order to prompt them to] to make research about the Samaritans, in order to spread the knowledge about the Samaritans. It’s very important to me. Especially when there are so many prejudices about the Samaritans. So it will open the issue for serious scholars. (Personal interview 16 Feb. 2012)
For Tsedaka, the textual diaspora of manuscripts is valuable for its cultural and historical meaning to the Samaritans, as well as for its potential to aid in the growth of Samaritan studies and thus also to help counter the “many prejudices about the Samaritans.”

Altif also notes that while the manuscripts are abroad, there is a greater potential for digitization because there are fewer overlapping property claims to manuscripts. He is concerned with the material constructs of manuscripts, though in a different but no less practical matter: ownership questions that exist or are created because of Samaritan cultural practice—the sharing of manuscripts among families. Altif states, “As long as [the manuscripts are] with foreign libraries [and] not Samaritan libraries [digitization] will be easier to do [. . .] when you come to the Samaritans every manuscript has many partners to it” (Personal interview 19 Apr. 2012). Even though Cohen, Tsedaka, and Altif have different ideas about repatriation, all three of them see the manuscripts’ potential to communicate knowledge about Samaritan culture.

However, electronically transmitting Samaritan culture is not simply about academic study. Textual diaspora has practical implications that move beyond the researching of Samaritan culture. According to Tsedaka and Cohen, two Elders regularly involved in communicating knowledge about the Samaritans’ culture, traditions, and history to outsiders, a cornerstone of their work is the ability to reference and share their written cultural heritage with Palestinians, Israelis, and internationals. Tsedaka’s and Cohen’s views are not without historical precedent. In an 1875 issue of *The Sunday Magazine for Family Reading*, there’s a story written by James Finn, the former British consul for Jerusalem and Palestine. Finn recounts a dialogue with Samaritan priest Amram, in which the priest “said that forty-two [Samaritan] volumes, large or small, had been stolen and sold.” According to Finn,

> He [Amram], being most desirous of conciliating the favour of our Government, then said that he had no objection to the books being placed in public libraries for the advantage of our learned men, but thought he ought to have the price of them given on behalf of the community, which was well known to be in a condition of extreme poverty. (229; emphasis added)

In the nineteenth century, textual diaspora enabled Samaritans to educate the outside world, and now, in the twenty-first, digitization works to do the same; Tsedaka and Cohen see digitization as a way to spread knowledge about the Samaritan culture.

Spreading knowledge about the Samaritans also connects with other initiatives related to the health and future well-being of the Samaritan people. For example, on July 12, 1995, eight Samaritan Elders authored a position paper called “The Seven Principles Document” that was distributed to the governments of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, the United States, and the United Kingdom. This document calls on the Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians to respect Samaritan cultural sovereignty:
We wish to ensure that in any political situation and irrespective of any political development, even in case of deterioration in the relations between parties to the peace agreement, free and unlimited passage shall be given at all times to every Samaritan, from any place where he/she may live, to the centers of Samaritans on Mt. Gerizim and in Nablus, to the Samaritan Holy sites on Mt. Gerizim in particular and in Judea and Samaria (otherwise known as “The West Bank of the Jordan River”) in general, and from there to any place within or outside the State of Israel. (qtd. in Tsedaka and Tsedaka 33)

Although the Samaritans are divided between Israeli and Palestinian civil societies, Samaritans must be able to reference their historic relationship to the land as an ancient Israelite people for both these audiences. More than that, they must also be able to explain their unique cultural heritage to outsiders within and beyond Israeli and Palestinian society, and they can do that best by referring to “their own writing [. . .] their own language [. . .] and historical tradition” through cultural artifacts (Tsedaka and Tsedaka 1).

This historical and cultural background information, when taken into consideration with Elders’ interviews, helps to explain why the digital amplification of the Samaritans’ textual diaspora is a desirable outcome for Elders such as the late High Priest Elazar. In addressing High Priest Elazar’s 2009 call for the broad digitization of Samaritan manuscripts, such digitization and future repository-building work also calls for theorizing the future rhetorical potential of texts to communicate Samaritan cultural histories, specifically manuscripts dispersed in textual diaspora, by investigating their history of removal (how they became dispersed) as well as how these texts will be accessed and used in future digital environments.

**Rhetorical Sovereignty and Digitization**

As the 1995 “Seven Principles Document” addresses the right of the Samaritan people to economic, political, religious, and cultural sovereignty in the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I also argue that Samaritan Elders’ ideas about their textual diaspora of manuscripts are highly rhetorical in the sense that the Elders are thinking about the future implications of digitization and circulation of Samaritan culture. Additionally, their concern for the transmission of their culture expresses what Scott Lyons calls *rhetorical sovereignty*, or “the general strategy by which [. . .] [indigenous people] aim to best recover our losses from the ravages of colonization: our lands, our languages, our cultures, our self-respect” (449). In addition to Lyons’s concept, I would add that Samaritans’ rhetorical sovereignty as it relates to the Elders I’ve interviewed also includes an emphasis on the need to amplify knowledge about their cultural identity in the midst of a large number of other interests and voices in the region.
As technology continues to evolve, so do the Samaritans’ connections to and imagined uses of and for their textual diaspora. One of the key understandings I gleaned from my 2009 fieldwork is that a group of Samaritans would like to see that textual diaspora move more fully into the digital realm through the use of mobile technology. This interest in mobile access, as also evidenced by the interview with Cohen in 2012, prompted the next stage in the future of digital repository design: enabling access to the prototype repository through a mobile application. To this end, in the next iteration of the project, Hart-Davidson and I are creating a mobile Facebook application tailored to the needs of the Samaritan community. Without field research into questions about what members of the community want from their diaspora of texts, what they want from their digitization, and most important, how and why they want to communicate and amplify their cultural heritage to the world, the development objectives of the digital repository would not be as rhetorically clear.

Five years since the initial digitization project began in 2007, and three years since I started to research the Samaritan textual diaspora from a rhetorical perspective, MSU has digitized portions of three fifteenth-century Samaritan Pentateuchs. I have also begun a second collaboration with HUC-JIR, where I have digitized a twelfth-century Samaritan scroll of Deuteronomy and a nearly complete fifteenth-century Samaritan Pentateuch. In the next few months, I will digitize an early twentieth-century Samaritan Torah scroll, and I am currently in the process of securing conservation dollars for manuscripts at HUC-JIR that require physical care prior to digitization. In addition, toward the goal of providing better access for the Samaritan community and scholars, I have rented a server in London—a site that is well situated geographically in terms of the stakeholders interested in the collections I am digitizing. This server will be able to host high-resolution images for Samaritans in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, while also providing speedy access to scholars in Europe and North America. I list this technical work and problems of digitization, hosting content, securing conservation dollars, and delivering content because this is the typical and perhaps most visible work of digitization. However, what I hope I have made clear is that digitization for the Samaritan Elders I’ve met is not a neutral activity: there’s a rhetorical dimension related to the future amplification and delivery of texts that provides context for the more quotidian work of digitization.

**Conclusion**

As Malea Powell argues from her research in brick-and-mortar archives, stories are transformative and have the potential to drive “new histories and theories” of rhetorical studies. There has not, though, been a great deal of crossover work between rhetorical studies and the digital humanities that shows how work with a foot in both fields may prompt new histories and theories for rhetorical studies (Powell
As the Samaritan example reveals, the digital delivery of cultural heritage has the potential to help cultural stakeholders advance their heritage through broader circulation. And the past, present, and potential future of such archival delivery is theoretically best understood, I argue, by conducting rhetorical historiography and fieldwork. In order for digital humanities to expand the realm of its concern from that of texts and what’s in them to how they are used by people and communities, it needs to engage with rhetorical studies. Scholars in rhetoric and composition and English studies are increasingly interested in recovering and fairly representing the voices of the students, scholars, activists, and other actors they study. By adopting a reciprocal relationship (see Cushman and Green) with stakeholders to promote collaborative development and research, the work I have described in this essay speaks to these concerns by offering one possible model for how rhetorical historiography may complement and enrich the work of building and delivering digital cultural repositories.

Rhetorical research into the history of collections and current cultural stakeholder attitudes toward their present or future archival delivery enhance and enrich such digital humanities projects. Using such an approach helps to realize what Jeff Grabill would describe as “engagement as a form of intellectual work” (15). As my long-term involvement with the building of digital cultural repositories for the Samaritans suggests, textual diaspora has important rhetorical potential to communicate cultural heritage. In doing so, this work also reflects a synergy between rhetorical studies, the digital humanities, and engaged scholarship (see Cushman; Cushman and Green). The digital humanities may benefit from collaboration and engaged rhetorical scholarship with diverse stakeholder groups. This engaged scholarship may consider the rhetorical impact of communicating texts as it relates to the desired goals or objectives of cultural stakeholders. In turn, this scholarship may inform and enrich the construction of digital humanities projects. By participating in engaged research, digital humanities and rhetoric scholars alike benefit not only from long-term collaboration, but also from the rich insights that develop over time. Such an approach both deepens and thickens the rhetorical historiography of our field.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Jessica Enoch and David Gold for their extensive editorial feedback on this article. I also wish to thank Benyamim Tsedaka for his significant assistance with my research, including additional Arabic translation help; and my co-PI on the digitization project, William Hart-Davidson. I am also grateful for the support of MSU and HUC-JIR.

2. I have been persuaded by Kate Theimer’s recent work, “Archives in Context and as Context,” to no longer use the term digital archive to describe the digital work that I have been doing. For this reason, I have described the digital infrastructure in this article as a digital repository.

3. To the extent that it relates to dispersed texts, the concept of textual diaspora may be useful to multiple areas of English studies: rhetoric, composition, and literary and cultural studies.
4. I use the term *stakeholder* to identify groups by their interest and connection to the texts. This could include a scholarly, historical, cultural, and religious connection to the texts.

5. Benyamim Tsedaka, his first name spelledםימינב with a mem sofit at the end (literally meaning “many days”), transliterates his last nameהקדצ into English as Sedaka as well as Tsedaka; however, throughout this article I have transliterated the Hebrew צ as Ts in order to maintain spelling consistency with the authorship of many of his publications such as *Between the Raindrops*.

6. After 2003, Tsedaka returned to MSU once a year from 2004 to 2010.

7. This level of university recognition did not happen on the scale that Tsedaka had imagined; however, from 2003–5 Director of Special Collections Dr. Peter Berg took the initiative to display a few items of the collection under glass in the basement reading room.

8. Later that day, I forwarded Tsedaka’s response to the directors of the WIDE Research Center, Hart-Davidson and Grabill. This idea had the makings of a WIDE project, and Hart-Davidson quickly wrote back and suggested NEH as a possible funding source.

9. For example, the website for the *Société d’Études Samaritaines* records that the organization “has 70 members, who work in academic institutions from Australia to Canada, from Israel to Scandinavia,” and study “Samaritan literature, languages, history, religion, theology, rites, calendar, music, and more” (“About”).

10. As the digital repository project moves forward, future publications will address work with the other two stakeholder groups.

11. Further summary and analysis of the NEH Office of Digital Humanities work may be found in the materials in the Works Cited. This collaborative work would not be possible without Hart-Davidson and McLeod. In particular, see our 2010 article “Balancing Stakeholder Needs” and 2011 article “Rhetoric and the Digital Humanities” (Ridolfo, Hart-Davidson, and McLeod).


13. Translated from Samaritan Hebrew.

14. In one case published in 1847 and recounted by the traveler, outright threats were made when the Samaritans refused to sell their manuscripts (Wilson 74). Wilson’s narrative is also significant because he records that the Samaritans understood in the early nineteenth century that their manuscripts had previously been stolen.

15. First, they sold modern or recent manuscripts produced in many cases for the Nablus tourist economy, and later, they sold more ancient manuscripts. In 1857 William Prime reports, “They would sell moderns, but I could not get them to name a price for the old one” (Prime 335). In a more disturbing set of incidents in 1854 and 1861, Samaritans were reportedly arrested, apparently under false pretenses by Ottoman police, and were forced to sell one of their more ancient manuscripts in order to raise money for bail (see Randall 154-58).

16. For a comprehensive list of collections around the world, see Jean-Pierre Rothschild, “Samaritan Manuscripts.”

17. By “situated in time and place” I mean that these responses do not constitute an absolute and unchanging position on these issues. Rather, responses on these topics may change over time.

18. We have yet to receive funding for this next stage of the project.

19. Powell’s ideas figure into the ethos of the digital repository and my book project. I remain grateful for her mentorship over the past ten years, and for the many conversations we have had about cultural rhetorics. Her work on cultural rhetorics has influenced my work and thinking, particularly about the relationship of cultural rhetorics to digital humanities.

20. Ellen Cushman’s early work on rhetoric and social change, “The Rhetorician,” and especially her ongoing collaborative new media work with the Cherokee Nation (Cushman and Green), has significantly influenced my work.
Works Cited


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