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Datum: April 28, 2021

Invitation to the 27th Scientific Salon on May 6, 2021

Dear Sirs and Madames,

The Universitätsgesellschaft Potsdam and its *Chapter on Jewish Theology* cordially invite you to the next **Scientific Salon**, taking place in online-format and in English because of its guests:

Thursday, May 6, 2021, 6:00 p.m.-7:30 p.m.

Our guest Prof. Dr. Idan Dershowitz,

(Chair of Hebrew Bible and Its Exegesis, School of Jewish Theology / University of Potsdam)

speaks on the topic:

**„The Biggest Mistake in the History of Biblical Studies:
A New Analysis of the Shapira Deuteronomy Manuscripts“**

Moderation: Rabbi Prof. Walter Homolka, PhD, PhD, DHL

(Chair of Modern Jewish Philosophy, focus on Denominations and Inter-Religious Dialogue,
School of Jewish Theology / University of Potsdam)

Topic description:

In 1883, Moses Wilhelm Shapira presented several blackened leather fragments to scholars, claiming they had been discovered by Bedouins in a cave near the Dead Sea. These fragments contained a text that seemed to be an idiosyncratic version of the book of Deuteronomy. If authenticated by the British Museum, Shapira reportedly stood to make a million pounds on their sale. While several of the fragments were being examined, others were put on display, drawing scores of onlookers, including the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, William Gladstone. The excitement was short lived, however, and the unanimous verdict soon came in: The fragments were forgeries, and Shapira himself was the immediate suspect. It wasn't long before Shapira took his own life.

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Following the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, some scholars revisited the Shapira fragments, thinking they might be a 2000-year-old abridgment of the book of Deuteronomy. Alas, by that time the manuscript fragments had gone missing, and the scholarly consensus of forgery would not budge.

In March 2021, I published new research showing that these long lost fragments are not only ancient but of unimaginable significance. The text they contain, which I call “The Valediction of Moses” or “V,” is not based on the book of Deuteronomy at all. It is, rather, a far earlier version of Deuteronomy. In other words, this text is a totally unprecedented document: a proto-biblical book.

What does this text teach us about the Bible and the history of religion? One of V’s most striking features is the absence of any divine law besides the Ten Commandments. The laws of Deuteronomy weren’t elided in V for brevity’s sake; for the author of this book, they simply didn’t exist. This radical idea was shared by other biblical authors and figures, including the prophet Jeremiah. All of this demonstrates that ideas that have traditionally been ascribed to Jesus and the authors of the New Testament – chief among them a focus on loving and adhering to God, rather than following His law– is not the revolution it is often perceived to be. Rather than simply being a polemic against the Hebrew Bible’s ostensible legalism, these ideas are extensions of a hoary tradition now being recovered in the Valediction of Moses.

Background of Idan Dershowitz:

Born 1982. Undergraduate and graduate training at the Hebrew University, following several years of yeshiva study. Elected in 2017 to the Harvard Society of Fellows. Currently Chair of Hebrew Bible and Its Exegesis at the University of Potsdam.

Dershowitz’s work has appeared in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, *Vetus Testamentum*, *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, and the *New York Times*. He is the author of two books: *The Dismembered Bible: Cutting and Pasting Scripture in Antiquity* (Mohr Siebeck, 2021) and *The Valediction of Moses: A Proto-Biblical Book* (Mohr Siebeck, 2021). Dershowitz is currently studying the composition history of Deuteronomy and the Priestly corpus.

Registration:

To receive the access link to the video conference at Zoom.UP, please register online: <https://www.uni-potsdam.de/de/uniges/veranstaltungen/aktuelle-veranstaltungen#c552458>

Warm regards,



Prof. Dr. Dieter Wagner
Chairman of the
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