

## THE TECHNIQUES OF THE SACRIFICE OF ANIMALS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL AND ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA: NEW INSIGHTS THROUGH COMPARISON, PART 1<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

There is an understandable desire among followers of religions that are monotheistic and that claim descent from ancient Israelite religion to see that religion as unique and completely at odds with its surrounding polytheistic competitors. Most would not deny that there are at least a few elements of Israelite religion that are paralleled in neighboring cultures, as, e.g., the Hittites,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank the following persons who read and commented on earlier drafts of this article: R. Beal, M. Hilgert, S. Holloway, R. Jas, B. Levine and M. Murrin. Abbreviations follow those given in W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965-1981); and M. Jursa and M. Weszeli, "Register Assyriologie," *A/O* 40-41 (1993/94): 343-369, with the exception of the following:

(a) series: D. O. Edzard, *Gudea and His Dynasty*, Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods (RIME) 3/1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); S. Parpola and K. Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, State Archives of Assyria (SAA) 2 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988); A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, SAA 3 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989); I. Starr, *Queries to the Sun God*, SAA 4 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1990); T. Kwasman and S. Parpola, *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh*, Part 1, SAA 6 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1991); F. M. Fales and J. N. Postgate, *Imperial Administrative Records*, Part 1, SAA 7 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992); H. Hunger, *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings*, SAA 8 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992); S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, SAA 10 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993); L. Kataja and R. Whiting, *Grants, Decrees and Gifts of the Neo-Assyrian Period*, SAA 12 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1995); E. von Weiher, *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk 2*, Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft in Uruk-Warka (ADFU) 10 (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1983); idem, *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk 3*, ADFU 12 (Berlin: GeBrüder Mann, 1988); E. von Weiher, *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk 4*, Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka, Endberichte (AUWE) 12 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1993); S. Langdon, *Die Neubabylonischen Königsinschriften*, Vorderasiatische Bibliothek (VAB) 4 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1912).

(b) books: A. Green, "Ancient Mesopotamian Religious Iconography" in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Sasson (New York: Scribner, 1995), 1837-1855; S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung: Eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserituale (Namburbi)* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1994).

Note that the numbering of Lev 5-6 follows that of the JPS Torah Commentary and of Catholic Bibles, rather than that of Protestant Bibles.

<sup>2</sup>For a summary of Hittite sacrificial practices, see G. Beckman, "Opfer.A.II," in *RLA* 10 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003): 106-111.

the Greeks, or at Ugarit, but the tendency is to see these elements either as fossilized remnants of borrowed Canaanite culture or as alleged Assyrian impositions,<sup>3</sup> in either case extraneous and essentially irrelevant accretions.

In sharp contrast to this view, Morton Smith<sup>4</sup> argued for the essential similarity of ancient Israelite religion with all other ancient religions of the Mediterranean area. He saw ancient Israelite religion, like ancient Mesopotamian religion, as being based on that sort of contractual, *do ut des*, relationship between man and god that is generally classified as “polytheism” or even “magic.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, he argued that similarities between ancient Israelite and other ancient Mediterranean religions are not necessarily evidence for cultural borrowings from Mesopotamia or survivals of Canaanite religion,

<sup>3</sup>The author agrees that there was no Assyrian imposition of religion, but would argue that those who seek to deny any similarity between ancient Israelite and ancient Mesopotamian sacrificial ritual are going too far. See, e.g. W. G. Lambert, who argues that “in modern usage, ‘sacrifice’ is too dependent on Biblical institutions and concepts to be a suitable vehicle to express ancient Mesopotamian practices,” and that “the Sumerians and Babylonians had nothing equivalent to Hebrew sacrifices” (“Donations of Food and Drink to the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia” in *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Quaegebeur, OLA 55 [1993]:191-201). Cf. R. de Vaux, who is willing to refer to what the ancient Mesopotamians did as “sacrifice,” but who agrees that “the essential forms of Israelite sacrifice, viz. the holocaust and the communion-sacrifice [‘peace’ offering], did not exist in Mesopotamia” (*Ancient Israel* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965], 2:434). B. Lafont agrees with this assessment, but is willing to allow for “points of convergence” between ancient Israel and Amorite Mari (“Sacrifices et rituels à Mari et dans la Bible,” *R4* 93 [1999]: 57-77).

<sup>4</sup>Morton Smith, “The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East,” in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. F. E. Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 49-65.

<sup>5</sup>Smith, 53, notes: “The relation between people and god was therefore always essentially a contractual one.” Karel van der Toorn also seeks to encourage the search for parallels between Israel and Mesopotamia (*Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* [Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1985]). His position is that, albeit monotheistic, ancient Israel was, like Mesopotamia, characterized by a non-Western mode of thought. He, 6, classes this non-Western mode as associative (as in “magical analogies”) in contrast to Western dissociative (as in rationalist “split and name”) thinking. The problem with this formulation is that associative thought is an imaginary beast; what is categorized as associative thought is actually a mixture of associative and dissociative thought, i.e., not the binary opposite of dissociative thought as it should be but the theoretically nonexistent middle. To make matters worse, ancient Greece, which should, in principle, mark the Western category was, at this time, also characterized by a mixture of associative and dissociative thought. Purely dissociative thought is an invention of the Persians (Mazdean dualism). In other words, the “Western” category is indeed Western if you mean René Descartes, but Eastern if you are talking about antiquity. It is also to be noted that, according to ancient Greek philosophers, any extreme (and dissociative thought is an extreme) is by definition false. In short, the alleged Eastern category is misdefined, and actually Western and the alleged Western category is false and actually Eastern. I think we need to try again.

but reflect the fact that similar problems tend to generate similar answers when faced by peoples with generally similar belief systems.

To argue that a particular practice was borrowed, it is not sufficient merely to show that there was a similarity. Instead, it must be established that the practice in question was confined to a restricted number of cultures within the Mediterranean region rather than common to all, that it was not practiced in the borrowing culture before a certain point in time, and that, at the time of alleged borrowing, there was actual contact between putative borrowers and borrowees. Subjected to this level of scrutiny, it is obvious that very few alleged borrowings will pass muster. Even allowing that failure to prove borrowing is not proof that borrowing did not occur, it is to be remembered that there existed in ancient Israel an attitude that foreign practices were inherently suspect. One might, then, begin to do what the neighbors did, but only if it seemed appropriate or if some salient event (such as a defeat) could be interpreted as a sign from YHWH that a particular (originally foreign) practice was henceforth to be followed. In either case, the practice would cease to be foreign, and the fact that it had been borrowed would essentially be irrelevant.

The Assyrian imposition model is even less promising as an explanation for observed similarities between ancient Israelite and ancient Mesopotamian practices. Assyria was, to be sure, an imperial power, but it did not practice cultural imperialism. It is a well-known fact that Assyrian monarchs felt (and were not ashamed to express) great admiration for Syro-Palestinian architectural styles and artwork in particular. It follows that the similarities in cult praxis, which we shall soon be describing between Israel and Assyria<sup>6</sup> (viz. regular holocaust offerings both to YHWH and to Assyrian gods), are not to be explained away as impositions by Assyrian overlords. Even if borrowing was the source of the similarity, we must not be too hasty in assuming that the direction of the borrowing was from East to West.

The important role played by Sennacherib in cultic reforms in Assyria must be stressed. It has long been known that his queen, Naqia Zakutu, had great influence over him, and it now appears that his mother was also from the West, perhaps, to judge by her name Athalayah, even a Judahite princess.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>As noted in W. R. Mayer and W. Sallaberger, "Opfer.A.I," in *RLA* 10 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 97, the closest parallels to holocaust offerings (see below) are from the Neo-Assyrian period.

<sup>7</sup>Stephanie Dalley, "Yabâ, Atalyâ and the Foreign Policy of Late Assyrian Kings," *SAAB* 12 (1998): 83-98. The thesis there presented that Yabâ is Atalyâ's mother would make the latter's marriage incestuous, as pointed out by K. Lawson Younger Jr., "Yahweh at Askelon and Calab? Yahwistic names in Neo-Assyrian," *VT* 52 (2002): 207-218. Dalley's formulation is, obviously, to be discarded. Neither is there any reason to suppose that religious considerations account for Sennacherib's being soft on Judah. Babylonians and Assyrians worshiped the same gods, but was Sennacherib soft on Babylonia? The important point about Athaliah is not that it is a -ya name but that it is a name characteristic of the Judahite royal family. (Although Younger is cautious on the subject of the equation of the name Atalyâ with the name Athaliah, he does admit that

Thus, if borrowing there was, it is as likely that it was by Assyrian monarchs from an original West Semitic context than the other way round.

Instead, then, of looking at Israel's neighbors as a source of contamination, what Smith's approach invites us to do is to see the surrounding regions as rich potential sources of texts that may cast new light on Israelite practices, which have thus far remained unexplained. And, for Assyriologists, conversely, there is the possibility that Israelite practices will aid in providing a better understanding of ancient Mesopotamia. This is certainly not to say that there were no differences between ancient Israel and its neighbors in matters of religion. On the contrary, each individual culture represented its own unique variant, which, however, existed in silent dialogue with other variants of the same religious system. It follows, however, that certain aspects of ancient Israelite religion and, in particular, the whys and why nots of the sacrificial system, can never be understood until the beliefs and practices of ancient Israelites have been put back into their original context.

Optimally, Israelite religious practices should be compared and contrasted with those of each and every culture of the ancient Mediterranean world of which we have sufficient records. In the interests, however, of establishing the usefulness of such an approach, which would require the input of specialists in many fields, as, e.g., Ugaritic studies and Hittitology, the following will present a trial comparison between the sacrificial practices of ancient Mesopotamia and those of ancient Israel in order to demonstrate the advantages and limitations of this type of cross-cultural comparison in gaining a better understanding of ancient religions.

This will be a broad survey of ancient Israelite and ancient Mesopotamian practices across the spectrum, and not an essay on the developments that must have occurred over the course of several millennia of history, nor a comparative study of regional differences.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that much of the evidence for the specifics of sacrificial ritual is, of necessity, drawn largely from the later periods (Neo-Assyrian and, in some cases, Seleucid).

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it cannot be excluded from possibility on purely linguistic grounds.) If it is admitted that Yabâ and Atalyâ might have been buried together because mother-in-law and daughter-in-law were fond of one another (as Naomi and Ruth) and not because they were genetically related, there remains the possibility that Atalyâ was indeed a member of the Judahite royal family, not, however, carried off or deported but acquired in an honest manner when Ahaz submitted to Tiglath-pileser III. On such occasions, it was the custom of the Assyrians to demand the surrender of women of the royal blood to serve as *sakintus* of Assyrian palaces "with dowries," presumably with the intention of marrying them off to minor members of the royal family or high officials. When Sargon seized the throne, his wife, by this scenario, unexpectedly became queen and her son, Sennacherib, was then a relative of Hezekiah. Religious matters aside, blood is thicker than water; if Hezekiah was indeed related to Sennacherib, it would go a long way toward explaining how he got off so lightly.

<sup>8</sup>For those interested in compiling such an essay or comparative study for ancient Mesopotamia, the place and/or time period of examples cited are usually indicated.

As is discussed more fully in my “Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Mesopotamian Religion,”<sup>9</sup> the relationship between men and gods in ancient Mesopotamia was cemented by regular offerings and occasional sacrifices of animals. In addition, there were divinatory, treaty, and “covenant” sacrifices. In each case, it was the form and procedure of the sacrifice that warned the recipient divinity that he was now entering a new relationship with a particular group of humans (“covenant” sacrifice), that he was now being continued in such a relationship (regular offerings), that some particular favor was now being asked (occasional sacrifice), that some piece of information was now required (divinatory sacrifice), and that he was now being called to witness and to insure the sanctity of oaths (treaty sacrifices). Before an animal could be sacrificed, however, certain preliminaries needed to be attended to.

### *Preliminaries for Sacrifice*

#### Choice of Animal

In ancient Mesopotamia, sacrificial animals, and in particular those used in divinatory sacrifice, had to be (at least apparently) healthy and unblemished. They were also not supposed to be scrawny; those intended for the gods’ table were fattened with barley for up to two years.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, animals for Israelite sacrifice, whether they were to be eaten or consumed as holocausts, could not be lame, blind, or suffer from any other serious defect, such as a skin disease.<sup>11</sup> This was for the simple reason that gods, whether singular or plural, would regard the sacrifice of an inferior animal as an insult.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup>In B. Collins, ed., *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), chap. 14; see also chap. 13.

<sup>10</sup>*Racc.* 77 r. 4-5. Note also “one fattened ox for the god’s meal” (MDP 10.55/71:1 [Ur III]); for other references, see *CAD* M/1 306-307 s.v. *marû* mng. 1b).

<sup>11</sup>Lev 22:17-25; Deut 15:21; 17:1; cf. Num 19:2.

<sup>12</sup>Deut 17:1. It is interesting to note the striking similarity between the defects that disqualified a priest from officiating at the sacrifice (Lev 21:17-23) and those that disqualified an animal from being sacrificed (Lev 22:17-25). See also Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus* 17–22, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 1870-1882, 1821-1834, 1836-1843; Baruch Levine, *Leviticus*, JPS Torah Commentary 3 (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 141 (chart). That both priests and animals needed to be without blemish is not unexpected; however, the word-for-word equivalence between requirements is striking and requires an explanation. This is supplied by Num 3:12-13; 8:15-19; cf. 3:40-51, which states that the Levites belonged to the Lord in place of the firstborn of the Israelites, who would otherwise have had to be offered to him in sacrifice. As such, the Levites were to be ritually sacrificed by having hands laid on their heads and being offered “as a wave offering” to the Lord (Num 8:9-11, 13-14; cf. 21-22). As human beings could not literally be offered unless “doomed,” however, the Levites, in turn, laid their hands on bullocks that were sacrificed in their place (Num 8:12). As symbolic sacrifices, it is understandable that the Levites would have come under the rules that governed the fitness of sacrificial animals.

The most typical animal for occasional sacrifice to any god in ancient Mesopotamia was a sheep, but virgin she-goats also appear with some frequency. In many cases (but not always), the sex of the animal used for regular or occasional sacrifice was the same as that of the deity receiving the offering; this does not, however, seem to have been an invariable rule. Gods could get cows, ewes,<sup>13</sup> and even virgin she-goats offered to them,<sup>14</sup> while goddesses were offered bulls, billygoats,<sup>15</sup> male lambs or sheep.<sup>16</sup> In ancient Israel, the usual requirement was that the animal sacrificed to the Lord must be an unblemished male,<sup>17</sup> but here too there were exceptions. In certain types of Israelite sacrifices, female animals were allowable<sup>18</sup> and for others they were actually mandated.<sup>19</sup>

One possible reason for worshipers being allowed to offer female animals to male divinities may have to do with economic realities. The male of the species is, generally speaking, a luxury rather than a necessity and is, for that reason, generally more highly valued than the female.<sup>20</sup> On a purely economic scale of value, the offering of an ox would have represented a considerable sacrifice.<sup>21</sup> It is, therefore, hardly surprising to notice that in ancient Mesopotamia cult objects (viz. the gods' or goddesses' stool, chariot, harp, or plow), when appealed to with sacrifices, generally got only a goat.<sup>22</sup> Similarly in

<sup>13</sup>See, e.g., M. E. Cohen, *Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1993), 86, 92.

<sup>14</sup>As in Maul, §§ V.3.1: 9-13, 77-79, V.3.2: 11-15.

<sup>15</sup>See, e.g., Cohen, 99, 102, 138.

<sup>16</sup>As in W. Farber, *Beschwörungssrituale* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1977), 185:13-14, 227:25-26; B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel*, Studia Pohl Series Maior 10/2 (Rome: Pontificio Institutum Biblicum, 1981), T 102:9; BBR no. 1-20:106-109.

<sup>17</sup>Exod 12:5; 29:1, 35-36; Lev 1:3, 10; 4:3, 14, 23; 5:15, 18, 25; 8:14, 18, 22; 9:2-4; 14:10, 21; 16:3, 5; 19:21; 22:18-19, 24; 23:18-19; Num 6:12, 14; 7:87-88; 8:8; 15:6, 8, 24; 28:11, 15, 19, 22, 27, 30; 29:2, 5, 8, 11, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 31, 32, 34, 36, 38; Ezek 43:19, 22-23, 25; 45:18, 22-23; 46:4, 6, 11. For details on the ages of sacrificial bulls, see Anders Hultgård, "The Burnt Offering in Early Jewish Religion," in *Gifts to the Gods: Proceedings of Uppsala Symposium, 1985*, ed. Tullia Linders and Gullög Nordquist (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987), 86.

<sup>18</sup>Lev 3:1, 6.

<sup>19</sup>Lev 4:28, 32; 5:6; 14:10; Num 6:14; 15:27; 19:2.

<sup>20</sup>Milgrom makes the opposite assumption, which leads him into certain difficulties (*Leviticus 1-16*, AB 3 [New York: Doubleday, 1991], 174). See esp. p. 252, where it is argued that the *shaykh* is required to give a "less valuable" offering than the pauper because he can better afford to do so.

<sup>21</sup>See F. Blome, *Die Opfermaterie in Babylonien und Israel* (Rome: Pontificio Institutum Biblicum, 1934), 62-63, 79-80, on the comparative rarity of cattle offerings at Lagash (as compared to sheep and goats).

<sup>22</sup>Cohen, 87, 89, 187; cf. 171, 174; Blome, 97-98. Some very special objects, such as the boat of the god Anu, received full-priced offerings (see Cohen, 218).

ancient Israel, the “sin” offering for a priest or the entire community was a bull,<sup>23</sup> whereas the same offering for a private individual took the form of a goat or a lamb.<sup>24</sup> If the sinner could not afford a sheep or goat, he could substitute birds and, ultimately, flour.<sup>25</sup>

Male and female animals seem to be similarly scaled. Israelite holocaust offerings required a male animal; the less holy “peace” offering could be male or female.<sup>26</sup> The sinning *shaykh* was required to provide a male goat, whereas the ordinary individual needed only to provide a female (and could substitute even for that),<sup>27</sup> implying that it was the responsibility of the leaders of the community to set an example for others.

Following this logic through consistently would, however, require seeing the “guilt” offerings, which require a male animal, as more important than the private “sin” offerings, which require a female. Since some of the former were for sins against man, which God could not unilaterally forgive,<sup>28</sup> this prioritizing is possible, if rather unexpected. The more usual explanation is that allowing for extensive substitutions made it less possible for a person to plead poverty to avoid performing “sin” offerings.<sup>29</sup>

In ancient Mesopotamia, omens were taken from the flaws and markings on the sacrificial animal and on the way it was observed to behave, both on the way to and during the sacrifice.<sup>30</sup> About what else befell the sacrificial animal before it was sacrificed, we hear little, except that, in the Neo-Assyrian *mīš pi* ritual, it is mentioned that *maṣḥatu*-flour was allowed to fall onto the forehead of the sheep before sacrifice.<sup>31</sup> There seems little parallel here with Israelite cult

<sup>23</sup>Lev 4:2-3, 13-14.

<sup>24</sup>Lev 4:22-23, 27-28, 32.

<sup>25</sup>Lev 5:7, 11.

<sup>26</sup>Lev 3:1, 6.

<sup>27</sup>Lev 4:22-23, 27-28, 32; 5:7, 11. The ashes of the Red Heifer were also intended for individual use, which is probably why it was a heifer. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 272.

<sup>28</sup>“The Day of Atonement atones for the sins between man and God. But the Day of Atonement does not atone for the sins between man and his fellow until he has made restitution to his fellow” (m. *Yoma*, 8:9). “If when you bring your gift to the altar, you suddenly remember that your brother has a grievance against you, leave your gift where it is before the altar. First go make your peace with your brother, and only then come back and offer your gift” (Matt 5:23f.; cf. t. *Pesah* 3:1). See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 370; cf. Levine, 33. For more on the distinction between “guilt” and “sin” offerings, see below.

<sup>29</sup>See, e.g., Levine, 28-29, 75, 88.

<sup>30</sup>For references, see E. Leichty, “Ritual, ‘Sacrifice,’ and Divination in Mesopotamia,” in *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Quaegebeur, OLA 55 (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Department Oriëntalistiek, 1993), 237-242.

<sup>31</sup>C. B. F. Walker and M. B. Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian mīš pi Ritual*, SAALT 1 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), 76:45. In Israel, the holocaust offering lamb was given a drink

praxis. However, the routine laying on of hands on the sacrifice,<sup>32</sup> although not explicitly attested from ancient Mesopotamia, can be elucidated by placing it in this wider context.

### The Laying On of Hands in Ancient Israel

The laying on of hands or other handling of the offering<sup>33</sup> was a fairly obvious method by which sin (for the “sin” offerings), guilt (for the “guilt” offerings), illness, defeat, crop loss, or other disaster occasioned by YHWH’s wrath (for the “peace” offerings), or any or all of the above (for the holocaust) could be safely transferred to the sacrificial animal,<sup>34</sup> with a view to subsequently retransferring it to the altar and sanctuary via the sacrificial blood (see below).

The desire for such a transfer, to be effected by the laying on of hands or other handling of the offering, is indicated in the terminology used to describe expiation as, e.g., in Lev 1:4: “He lays his hand on the head of the holocaust so that, assuming (the sacrifice) is acceptable for him,<sup>35</sup> it may provide ritual cleansing (*kipper*) for him.”<sup>36</sup> The term used for “ritual cleansing” is, as has long been recognized,<sup>37</sup> cognate to the Akkadian *kuppuru*, which specifically refers to the “magical” transfer of problems from a human patient to a surrogate by means of direct physical contact.<sup>38</sup>

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from a golden bowl just before it was killed (see Hultgård, 88).

<sup>32</sup>Exod 29:10, 15, 19; Lev 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33; 8:14, 18, 22; Num 8:12. Cf. Num 8:10; 2 Chron 29:23.

<sup>33</sup>On the equivalence of the handling of offerings and the laying on of hands, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 151-152.

<sup>34</sup>On this point, see also Theodor Herzl Gaster, “Sacrifices,” *IDB*, 152. This is Milgrom’s “explanation a” (*Leviticus 1-16*, 151), but with considerably more being potentially transferred than just “sin.” It is to be remembered that, for believers in nonsalvation religions, “sins” are dangerous because they occasion divine anger, which will result in this-worldly disaster, and that it is disasters, or the fear of same, which occasions the offering of sacrifices and not, as in salvation religions, the threat of punishment in the hereafter. Milgrom rightly rejects “explanation b” (“identification”), which holds that the laying on of hands was “intended to penetrate the animal with the soul of the offerer.” If that were the case, the killing of the animal in sacrifice would have been intended to bring about the immediate death, dismemberment, and cremation of the offerer! For “explanation c” and “explanation d,” see below.

<sup>35</sup>*sāmak yād . . . weniršā lō lekappēr ‘alav*. The conventional translation of this passage takes *weniršā* as a result clause with the sacrifice as the subject and the sacrificer as the intended dative object. See, e.g., Levine, 6; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 153. For reasons which will be made clear below, I prefer to understand the *waw* as epexegetical.

<sup>36</sup>See Levine, xviii.

<sup>37</sup>See, e.g., Levine, 23-24; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 306-307.

<sup>38</sup>For references, see *CAD K*, 178-180. Milgrom accepts this meaning as of direct applicability for the “sin” offerings and ordination “peace” offering only (*Leviticus 1-16*,



To fully appreciate this parallel, it must be realized that, Frazer to the contrary notwithstanding, “magical” transfers were not “automatic” and had nothing to do with “contagion.” Ancient Mesopotamians recognized that diseases could be contagious; the expressions that they used to describe this, however, are not related to the verb used to describe transfers, which implies a complete removal, literally “extraction” of the illness. In contrast to the situation with contagious diseases, the ill did not simply infect the recipient, but was actually drawn into the recipient, leaving the patient free and clear (and the recipient somewhat damaged) in the process. Thus another way of looking at it was as an exchange of good and bad qualities between patient and recipient, an exchange which is not infrequently explicitly mentioned in the legomena of ancient Mesopotamian transfer rites.<sup>39</sup>

In sorcerous transfers, this equation was reversed; that is, the victim lost his good health or luck to the sorcerer’s charm and received either the sorcery or some other undesirable quality in return. Thus “leaning” one’s hand on someone (*qātu ummudr*: the Akkadian equivalent of Hebrew *sāmak yād*)<sup>40</sup> could result either in healing (when the *āšipu* did this to a patient) or conversely bewitchment (when a sorcerer did this to his victim).

This exchange was essentially a “bad bargain,” in which the surrogate was paid for desired benefits with tainted offerings.<sup>41</sup> It was, nonetheless, still a bargain and, as such, could not by its very nature be “automatic,” but had to be carefully arranged beforehand and might require guarantors to insure compliance. It was, therefore, to show proper respect to the deity to say that laying hands on a sacrificial animal would result in ritual cleansing, “assuming

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410, 529, 1079-1084). For the other offerings, he argues that “expiation” is meant and that the laying on of hands is not a rite of transfer but a mark of “authenticated ownership,” without which the sacrifice was invalid (152). This is almost exactly the opposite of Levine, 6, who understands “hand leaning” as marking off the sacrifice as sacred and belonging to God. A particular difficulty with Milgrom’s interpretation arises in his discussion of what is conventionally translated as “wave” offerings (462-463), where Milgrom argues that the reason that portions of “peace” offerings are “waved”—whereas holocaust offerings are not—is that the former “initially belong to their offerers whereas most sacred gifts belong to the Lord from the start.” If hand laying was an assertion of private ownership, and if one type of sacrifice was privately owned and the other wasn’t, should not one type of sacrifice have required hand leaning and not the other? And if holocaust offerings belonged to the Lord from the start, would it not have been offensive, to put it mildly, to insist by special ritual that they were the private property of the sacrificer?

<sup>39</sup>See JoAnn Scurlock, “Translating Transfers in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. P. Mirecki and M. Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 209-223.

<sup>40</sup>The equivalence is acknowledged in Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 150, 153.

<sup>41</sup>The Philistines’ “guilt offering” of golden hemorrhoids and golden rats, which accompanied the return of the Ark of the Covenant (1 Sam 6:1-18), was clearly intended to retransfer the plague of hemorrhoids and rats (5:6-12) to the place from which it had come.

(the sacrifice) is acceptable."<sup>42</sup> Philo<sup>43</sup> was perfectly correct in asserting that the gesture was intended as a "declaration" (i.e., a signal of desired cleansing) rather than the actual cleansing itself, which only YHWH could grant.<sup>44</sup>

A similar sentiment informs the story of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai and the "heathen,"<sup>45</sup> where the Rabbi explains to the "heathen" that the purificatory ceremony with the ashes of the Red Heifer, another ostensibly "magical" transfer rite,<sup>46</sup> is essentially equivalent to the "heathen's" exorcism of a madman

<sup>42</sup>See above.

<sup>43</sup>Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1:202-204.

<sup>44</sup>This is Milgrom's "explanation c" (*Leviticus* 1-16, 151). "Explanation d," which is followed by Milgrom, de Vaux, Sarna, and many others, namely, that the laying on of hands was a mark of "ownership" of the sacrificial animal, seems to miss the point. Yes, it would be important for the animal to belong to the one sacrificing it, but only because, like the adopted son who carried out Confucian rites for his adoptive ancestors but benefitted his real ancestors instead, if a person used someone else's animal, they would run the risk that *the other person* would receive the benefit of *their* sacrifice.

<sup>45</sup>See Milgrom, *Leviticus* 1-16, 270-271.

<sup>46</sup>This is classified by Milgrom as lying on a continuum of more or less "pre-Israelite" customs, which begins with the purificatory sacrifice for "leprosy," progresses through the rite of the Red Heifer and the Ritual of Atonement, ending with the "sin" offering as the youngest and least similar (although still comparable) to ancient Mesopotamian "magical" transfer rites (*Leviticus* 1-16, 270-278). Although the author is to be commended for recognizing the "ritual cleansing" of "sin" offerings as comparable to "magical" transfer, the schema is rather Tyloresque, particularly in its details. Why, if it were not for the fact that ancient Israel and ancient Mesopotamia allegedly differ on these points, should it be more "magical" to exorcize people than to exorcize objects (274)? And why should "magical" rites be more, rather than less, likely to require the services of an ordained priest (275)? The real objection, however, is that the assumption—that this artificially created progression from "paganism" generated by "obsessive irrational fears" (275) to "monotheism" represents a real and chronological development in the history of ancient Israelite religion—involves the author in a basic failure of logic. If, as he argues, there is no trace of "magical transfer" in the laying of hands on the holocaust and "peace" offerings, despite the use of the same "expiatory" language (410), must not the "sin" offerings be older than the holocaust offerings by this schema? Yet the author retains the conventional (Rabbinic) chronological ordering of these rites: holocaust and "peace" offerings first, "sin" and "guilt" offerings as later developments (268, 288-289). This problem can be partially remedied by realizing that Milgrom's argument may be predicated on Tylor's theory of the evolution of religion from magic, but what he is actually talking about is cultural borrowing. When items are taken from another culture and reworked, the closer the item is to its original form, the more recently it must have been borrowed. If then, Milgrom's assumptions are reversed, and what he claims to be genuine "magical" rites, which have been gradually adapted by the Israelites to their own monotheistic context (289), are ordered earliest to latest in accordance with their degree of transformation, then "sin" offerings become later than holocaust offerings as they should be by conventional ordering. Unfortunately, what that means is that if, as he also argues,

and then adds, for the benefit of his students:

By your lives, I swear: the corpse does not have the power by itself to defile, nor does the mixture of ash and water have the power by itself to cleanse. The truth is that the purifying power of the Red Cow is a decree of the Holy One. The Holy One said: "I have set it down as a statute, I have issued it as a decree. You are not permitted to transgress my decree." This is the statute of the Torah.<sup>47</sup>

What is not commonly appreciated is that the insistence, both within ancient Israelite religion itself and in later Rabbinic commentaries, that these transfer rites could only work, or at least only work properly, God willing, is not a "break with paganism"<sup>48</sup> but actually part and parcel of the original, polytheistic system. Rabban Yohanan's explanation to his students, and particularly the reference to the Torah, evokes the ancient Mesopotamian saying quoted to Esarhaddon by Balasi: "Ea made it; Ea unmade it. He who created the earthquake is the same one who created (its) NAM.BÛR.BI (apotropaic ritual)."<sup>49</sup>

It was presumably this always-inherent possibility that the spirit would decline to accept a particular sacrifice (and with it the contract dependent on it) that gave rise to the ancient Mesopotamian practice of taking preliminary omens from the flaws and markings on the sacrificial animal and the way it was observed to behave, both on the way to and during the sacrifice. Omens were the means by which man communicated with gods and gods with man; taking an omen at this point gave the divinity to whom the sacrifice was to be offered an opportunity to express his willingness (or unwillingness) to comply with the sacrificer's request.<sup>50</sup>

Nonetheless, there was Torah, and there were NAM.BÛR.BIs; the gods whom human beings kept happy with offerings were predisposed to cleanse away ills and forgive sins, assuming that certain basic procedures were followed. Unfortunately, this very cooperativeness (a feature of gods as opposed to demons, who had to be subjected to ritual oaths<sup>51</sup> before they could be trusted to keep their bargains) exacerbated the ever-present danger of accidental transfer. In other words, when contact was accidentally established between a

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Israelites performing "sin" offerings no longer recognized them as magical (279-280), whereas the rite of the Red Heifer was still so obviously magical that Rabbinic tradition recognized its origins, then the "sin" offerings will have to have been borrowed at a much earlier date than the Red Heifer rite.

<sup>47</sup>*Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 4:7.

<sup>48</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus* 1-16, 278.

<sup>49</sup>R. F. Harper, ed., *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collections of the British Museum (ABL)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1892-1914), 355 r. 9-12.

<sup>50</sup>It was presumably for this reason that the Philistines allowed the cart carrying the returning Ark of the Covenant and their "guilt offering" to make its own way home (1 Sam 6:7-9).

<sup>51</sup>See, e.g., J. Scurlock, *Magico-Medical Means of Treating Ghost Induced Illnesses in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Groningen: Brill-Styx, 2006), nn. 18, 120, 131.

potential donor and recipient, there was the danger that the exchange of good and bad qualities might take place, but that the recipient or guarantor, not having been adequately paid for services rendered, might become infuriated, with disastrous consequences.

It was for this reason that those who ate of the Israelite "peace" offering had to be ritually clean<sup>52</sup> (as did all who came into contact with holy objects), lest some unpaid-for impurity be accidentally transferred in the process.<sup>53</sup> It was for this reason also that the laying on of hands was traditionally preceded by hand washing.<sup>54</sup> Optimally, this washing reinforced the message that cleansing was desired, but at the very least it avoided the problem of the dirt on the sacrificer's hands being all that got cleansed off, or worse yet that the wrath of YHWH was brought down on the head of the sacrificer.

That ritual cleansing was indeed the object of ancient Israelite sacrifice is made explicit in the annual scapegoat ritual:

When he has completed the atonement rite for the sanctuary, the meeting tent and the altar, Aaron shall bring forward the live goat. Laying both hands on its head, he shall confess over it all the sinful faults and transgressions of the Israelites, and so put them on the goat's head. He shall then have it led into the desert by an attendant. Since the goat is to carry off their iniquities to an isolated region, it must be sent away into the desert.<sup>55</sup>

This almost directly parallels the custom, attested in the Neo-Assyrian *bīt rimki* ("bath house") ritual, of having the king station a variety of prisoners, human and otherwise, to his right and left and then release them as a means of ridding himself of his misdeeds:

The prince makes seven prisoners (i.e., convicts) sit to the right and seven to the left before *Šamaš* and says as follows: "I have remitted their misdeeds. . . . I will release a bound sheep before you.<sup>56</sup> Just as I release this sheep, so may any evil misdeed, crime, offense or omission which is in my body be released before

<sup>52</sup>See Lev 22:3-8. Similarly, Lev 6:20: "[A]nyone who is to touch (the flesh of the sin offering) must be in a holy state." See Levine, 40. Milgrom follows a school which regards holiness as "contagious" (*Leviticus 1-16*, 443-456); see Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, JPS Torah Commentary [Philadelphia: JPS, 1991], 191). This position is directly denied by Mal 2:11-13 (see Levine, 38). According to the priesthood of Jerusalem in the early postexilic period, impurity could be transferred by physical contact; holiness could not. To make a person or object holy required a rite of consecration.

<sup>53</sup>If the person who ate of an offering was unclean, some impurity that had not been paid for by sacrifice could potentially be passed to the sanctuary and some of the sanctuary's purity could be lost in the exchange. On the marked tendency of impurities to be attracted into holy objects, see Levine, 38.

<sup>54</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 153.

<sup>55</sup>Lev 16:20-22.

<sup>56</sup>A bound sheep is listed in an inventory presumably—to judge from the appearance also of a gazelle, chicken/goose, duck, pairs of birds and a live fish—for the performance of this very ritual (von Weiher, *SpTU* 4 no. 128:75-77).

your godship." . . . He captures two birds. . . . The king releases them to east and west and the king says [the recitation]: "I have remitted their misdeeds." The seven and seven prisoners who were held to the right and left of the king he releases.<sup>57</sup>

Much has been made of the fact that the typical Israelite sacrificial offering was marked by the laying on of a single hand, whereas the ritual scapegoat had two hands laid upon his head.<sup>58</sup> This should not, however, be taken as evidence for a different origin for the former rite. The reason for the difference is immediately apparent from the context—the sacrificial animal upon whom one hand was laid was intended to absorb the sin, guilt, or other problem of an individual sacrificer. If, therefore, the officiating priest at the ritual of atonement had laid only one hand on the scapegoat, only his personal sins would have been cleansed away. The intent of the rite was, however, that "all the sinful faults and transgressions of the Israelites" should be cleansed away; therefore, he, instead, laid on two hands, one for himself and the other for everyone else.

Once transferred to the sacrificial animal, the sin, guilt, or other problem of the Israelite sacrificer was subsequently transferred to the sanctuary in the course of the sacrifice: "To find favor with the Lord, he shall bring it to the entrance of the meeting tent and there lay his hand on the head of the holocaust so that, assuming it is acceptable for him, it may provide ritual cleansing for him. He shall then slaughter the bull before the Lord, but Aaron's sons, the priests, shall offer up its blood by splashing it on the sides of the altar which is at the entrance of the meeting tent."<sup>59</sup> It was for this reason that the structure with cherubim that sat on top of the ark<sup>60</sup> was referred to as an "instrument of ritual cleansing" (*kapporet*).<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., *SpTU* 2 no. 12 ii 20-21, 31-33, iii 15, 20-24; cf. ibid., *SpTU* 3 no. 68 i 1-16.

<sup>58</sup>See, e.g., D. P. Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature," *JAOS* 106 (1986): 433-446 (with previous literature); cf. Levine, 6; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 151. Rabbinic tradition resolved the problem by assuming that two hands were actually meant in all cases (Sarna, 188).

<sup>59</sup>Lev 1:3-5. See also Exod 29:10-12, 15-16, 19-21; Lev 1:11, 15; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4-7, 15-18, 24-25, 29-30, 33-34; 8:14-15, 18-19, 22-24; 9:9, 12, 18; 17:6; Num 18:17; Deut 12:27; Ezek 43:18, 20; 44:15; cf. 2 Chron 29:21-24. For the exact locations on the altar where the blood was splashed, see Hultgård, 89. Aaron was protected from contamination by a special gold plate worn on his forehead (Exod 28:36-38). It was also customary in the Second Temple period for the priests to wash both hands and feet before commencing the holocaust sacrifice (ibid., 88).

<sup>60</sup>Exod 25:17-22.

<sup>61</sup>This object is now conventionally translated as "cover" (as, e.g., *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* 4:457-458; cf. Sarna, 161). This translation assumes a connection with Arabic *kafara*. It has escaped notice, however, that what is being translated as "to cover" is listed in *CAD* as a secondary meaning of the Akkadian verb *kāpāru*: "to cleanse (magically) by rubbing." This secondary meaning (or separate verb, according to von Soden's *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*) is used in Akkadian fairly specifically to refer to coating an object with bitumen (*kupru*) to make it watertight (for references, see *CAD*

In two cases—the ordination (“peace”) offering<sup>62</sup> and the guilt offering for *šaraʿat*<sup>63</sup>—part of the blood was smeared on the tip of the sacrificer’s right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe of the right foot, creating indirect contact between the person to be purified and the altar<sup>64</sup> (cf. the splashing of bowls of blood onto the worshipers by Moses to cement the renewed covenant between YHWH and the Israelites).<sup>65</sup> The principle involved is readily illustrated by a set of purificatory rites, also for *šaraʿat*, in which one of a pair of birds was slaughtered in the presence of the patient. The surviving bird was dipped into the blood of the slaughtered bird, which was also used to sprinkle the patient, thus establishing indirect contact between the patient and the live bird. When the live bird was subsequently released to fly away over the countryside, it took the impurity away with it.<sup>66</sup>

A further transfer of sin, guilt, and problems to the Israelite sanctuary was

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K 178-180 mngs. 2, 4). “This meaning of the root appears in Hebrew in Gen. 6.14. In Arabic, the roots, if originally separate, have fallen together, primary and secondary meanings have been reversed, and the dual and opposite connotations of the root (‘to smear pitch on’ and ‘to wipe dirt off’) have been exploited to convey on the one hand the spiritual blackening of one’s face (as with pitch) by refusal to believe in God (hence *kefir*, ‘infidel’) and on the other the potential cleansing (or whitening) of the sinner’s face by some combination of penance, atonement or forgiveness (as the Arabs say ‘whiten the face’)” (F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* [BDB] [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907], 497). Hebrew etymological dictionaries attempt to use the translation “to cover,” drawn from the primary meaning of Arabic *kafara*, to convey the sense of cleansing (from sin), which is the primary meaning of Akkadian *kaṣāru*. This seems rather backward. That an Arabic word manages to mean itself and its opposite is hardly surprising, but it seems a bit odd that the Arabic primary meaning, which refers to a person “covered” with sin (as with bitumen), should be used to justify the translation of a term in Hebrew, whose primary meaning, as in Akkadian, is clearly the opposite process of cleansing from evils (a.k.a. sin). Both the LXX and Vulgate translations agree that the *kapporet* had to do with “propitiation,” and the object in question was not, in any case, a cover. As Sarna, 160-161, notes the *kapporet* was imagined as YHWH’s throne and the ark as his footstool. Is a throne the “cover” for a footstool? On further problems with the translation “cover,” see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1014.

<sup>62</sup>Exod 29:19-21; Lev 8:22-24, 30.

<sup>63</sup>Lev 14:14, 25.

<sup>64</sup>In the ordination sacrifice, blood from the altar was also sprinkled on the priest and his vestments (Exod 29:21; Lev 8:30).

<sup>65</sup>Exod 24:5-8.

<sup>66</sup>Lev 14:6-7, 49-53. On this point, see also Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 838. Compare the Emar ritual to purify a patient from *šaḫaršubba*, which requires him to burn one shelduck as a holocaust offering and to rub the other over himself before releasing it (A. Tsukimoto, “By the Hand of Madi-Dagon, the Scribe and Apkallu-Priest”—A Medical Text from the Middle Euphrates Region,” in *Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East*, Colloquium on the Ancient Near East 2, ed. K. Watanabe [Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1999], 199-200, 88-89).

achieved on festival days, when the people were actually allowed to enter the inner court of the temple: "When the people of the land enter the presence of the Lord to worship on the festivals, if they enter by the north gate they shall leave by the south gate, and if they enter by the south gate they shall leave by the north gate; no one shall return by the gate through which he has entered, but he shall leave by the opposite gate."<sup>67</sup> Passing by a recipient is a commonplace method of transfer. The reason for the prohibition on leaving by the same gate as one entered is quite obviously the same as a not-uncommon warning in ancient Mesopotamian transfer rites that the patient is not to look behind or to take (to get home) the road he or she took to get there, namely, to prevent the problem from being retransferred right back to the patient in the process.<sup>68</sup> It was this practice of transferring human problems to divinities (also attested in ancient Mesopotamia) that necessitated an annual purification of the Israelite sanctuary in the Ritual of Atonement. One of the main reasons that temple buildings and the statues of gods (or for aniconic deities, the upright stone, or the ark, for instance), need periodic "baths" or other purification is that they become polluted with the problem-causers (e.g., demons, misdeeds, pollution, bad omens, curses, witchcraft), which they have obligingly removed from human supplicants during the course of the year. Note that the "instrument of ritual cleansing" (*kapporet*) was the particular focus of purification rites that took place in the holy of holies on that day.<sup>69</sup>

In this annual Israelite purification rite, a series of "sin" offerings was performed by the priest to make atonement for himself and "for the sanctuary because of all the sinful defilements and faults of the Israelites" and for the altar to "render it clean and holy, purged of all the defilements of the Israelites."<sup>70</sup> "Sin" offerings were also used independently to purify and consecrate altars.<sup>71</sup> The object of performing an animal sacrifice for this purpose was not simply to produce a ritual bath of purifying blood,<sup>72</sup> since if that were the case every ancient Israelite offering would have purified the altar. When the blood of the "sin" offering was dotted on the horns<sup>73</sup> and poured out into the trough at the base of the altar,<sup>74</sup> indirect contact was established between the altar and the sacrificial

<sup>67</sup>Ezek 46:9.

<sup>68</sup>For specific examples of such prohibitions, see Scurlock, "Translating Transfers in Ancient Mesopotamia," 217, 221.

<sup>69</sup>Lev 16:11-16.

<sup>70</sup>Lev 16:3-19, esp. 16 and 19; Exod 30:10.

<sup>71</sup>Exod 29:35-37; Lev 6:23; Ezek 43:18-27; cf. 2 Chron 29:21-24. For a discussion of the Ezekiel passage, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 281-284.

<sup>72</sup>So Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 254-258, 261-264.

<sup>73</sup>For a discussion and illustrations of horned altars, see *ibid.*, 234-236.

<sup>74</sup>This trough is described in Ezek 43:13-17; cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 238-239.

animal, which was to serve as recipient of the impurity.<sup>75</sup>

The parallel between the establishment in the "guilt" offering for *šaraʿat* of indirect contact between the person to be purified and the altar, which was to receive his impurity, and Ezekiel's sanctification rite between the altar to be purified and the "sin"-offering bull and he-goat, which were to receive its impurity, could not be more striking. In the former, the tip of the sacrificer's right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe of the right foot were smeared with the sacrificial blood;<sup>76</sup> in the latter, the blood was daubed on the corresponding parts of the altar, namely, the horns ("ears"), the corners of the ledge ("hands"), and the gutter at the base ("feet").<sup>77</sup>

What gave "sin" offerings their purificatory properties, then, was not the blood, but the manner of disposal of the sacrificial animal's carcass. When a "sin" offering was intended for the priest or for the community as a whole or was being used to purify and consecrate an altar, the flesh, hide and offal, all or part of which were usually burned on the altar, were instead taken "outside the camp" and incinerated there.<sup>78</sup> The effect was to draw off any impurities into the desert. To make sure that they stayed there, in the annual ritual of atonement, "the one who burns them shall wash his garments and bathe his body in water; only then may he enter the camp."<sup>79</sup>

### The Importance of Blood

The importance of blood in Israelite religion is justly stressed; the blood and caul fat<sup>80</sup> of all animals, which it was permissible to eat, whether actually sacrificed or not,<sup>81</sup> were reserved for the Lord: "Wherever you dwell, you shall not partake of any blood, be it of bird or of animal. Every person who partakes of any blood shall be cut off from his people."<sup>82</sup> "Since the life of a living body is in its blood, I have made you put it on the altar, so that atonement may thereby be made for your own lives, because it is blood, as the seat of life, that makes atonement. That is why I have told the Israelites: 'No one among you, not even a resident alien,

<sup>75</sup>Blood can purify, but it does so because it absorbs impurities, and whatever absorbs impurities can also be used to transfer them.

<sup>76</sup>Lev 14:14, 25; cf. 14:17, 28.

<sup>77</sup>Ezek 43:20. On the similarity with the corresponding rite in the priest's ordination, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 528-529.

<sup>78</sup>Exod 29:12, 14; Lev 4:5-7, 11-12, 16-18, 21; 6:23; 8:15, 17; 9:9, 11; 16:18-19, 27; Ezek 43:20-21; cf. Num 19:4-5, 9.

<sup>79</sup>Lev 16:28; cf. Num 19:7-10. Cf. Lev 16:26: "The man who has led away the goat for Azazel shall wash his garments and bathe his body in water; only then may he enter the camp."

<sup>80</sup>Ordinary fat was permissible; see Levine, 16, 45.

<sup>81</sup>Lev 7:22-27; 17:13-14; Deut 12:15-28; 15:21-23.

<sup>82</sup>Lev 7:26-27. See also Gen 9:4; Lev 3:17; 17:10; 19:26.



may partake of blood.”<sup>83</sup> The consequence of noncompliance was to be cut off from the community since to eat the blood of an animal was tantamount to murder, a violation of the commandment “Thou shalt not kill,” and a rupture of the covenant of Moses, which linked the Israelites to their god by means of a stream of blood:

Moses took half of the blood (of the sacrificial animals) and put it in large bowls; the other half he splashed on the altar. Taking the book of the covenant, he read it aloud to the people, who answered, “All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do.” Then he took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying: “This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words of his.”<sup>84</sup>

Aliens, too, had made their peace with YHWH by submitting to the leaders of the Israelite community and had, consequently, a covenant also to protect.

A covenant relationship between man and god was not the concept in Mesopotamia; neither was it the custom to eat the blood of animals, whether sacrificed or not. It is the relationship between the blood and the covenant and the concomitant attitude that a person killing his own animal for food but neglecting to use proper procedure could be guilty of murder, that seems odd from a Mesopotamian perspective.

This having been said, however, there is little about the actual use of the blood in sacrificial context that would not have been immediately comprehensible to a Mesopotamian observer. An ancient Mesopotamian animal sacrifice, properly speaking, consisted of the shedding of the animal’s blood, as the phrase used to describe the process (*nīqu naqû*) indicates.<sup>85</sup> So important was the blood to the sacrifice, that the failure of it to appear required the performance of an apotropaic ritual (NAM.BÚR.BI).<sup>86</sup> Similar rituals were used for other obvious disruptions of the ritual procedure, as when the sacrificer inadvertently knocked over the offering table, broke the drinking cup, spilled the food, tipped over the beer, or worst of all (literally) fell flat on his face.<sup>87</sup>

In ritual context, the appearance of this blood was insured by cutting the throat of the sacrificial animal (*nakāsu*).<sup>88</sup> One of Sennacherib’s reliefs<sup>89</sup> shows a

<sup>83</sup>Lev 17:11-12. See also Deut 12:23.

<sup>84</sup>Exod 24:5-8.

<sup>85</sup>For the specific meaning (in a nonsacrificial context) of “to shed blood” for this verb, see CAD N/1 338/341 s.v. *naqû*, mngs. 2, 5b, 6a. See also E. P. Dhorme, *La religion Assyro-Babylonienne. Conférences données à l’institut catholique de Paris* (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1910), 272. For the general significance of blood, see G. Pettinato, “Il sangue nella letteratura sumerica”; and L. Cagni, “Il sangue nella letteratura Assiro-Babilonese” in *Sangue e Antropologia Biblica*, Centro Studi Sanguis Christi 1, ed. F. Vattioni (Rome: Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, 1981), 37-85.

<sup>86</sup>Maul, §VIII.19, cf. VI.3.1:9’.

<sup>87</sup>See Leichty, 241.

<sup>88</sup>As, e.g., in Maul, §V.3:12, 79, VI.3.1:9’, VIII.10:22, 34-35(!), 62-63, 91, VIII.18:7,

slaughtering operation in progress. The animal, hind feet tethered, was laid on its back on a flat surface elevated above the ground so that the head hung down, exposing the neck. An assistant held the forelegs fast, while the slaughterer cut the throat over a waiting vessel, holding the animal's mouth with his free hand. The relief shows this operation being performed on what looks like an ordinary table. In cultic texts, the locus for slaughter is described as a *maškitu*.<sup>90</sup>

This procedure by itself was adequate only for small, docile animals. Bulls, at least, had to be killed first before the throat could be safely cut.<sup>91</sup> The actual slaughter of a bull (*palāqu*)<sup>92</sup> was carried out with a special knife (*naplaqu*), with which the animal was stabbed, producing a characteristic bellow.<sup>93</sup> Then the bull was ready to be laid out for the rest of the operation.<sup>94</sup> While all this was being done, the name of the god(s) and/or goddess(es) who was (were) to receive the meat was (were) invoked to insure that uninvited guests did not share in the offering.<sup>95</sup>

The methods of killing sacrificial animals were similar in ancient Israel. Not only is the Hebrew word for sacrificial slaughter (*šābat*) the exact equivalent of Akkadian *nakāsu*: "to cut (the throat),"<sup>96</sup> but Ezekiel also describes

73, VIII.19:1; Farber, 57:20, 185:14, 227:25; von Weiher, *SpTU* 2 nos. 5:65; 17 iv 15; *Racc.* 24 r. 9, 78 r. 8-9,11; G. van Driel, *The Cult of Aššur* (Assen: Van Gorcum), 202 r. 9'-10'; *BBR* nos. 1-20:75,115; 26 ii1; 84-85:5; 86:5; Emar VI.3 nos. 369:14; 385:29; 446:31. For other references, see *CAD* N/1 177-178 s.v. *nakāsu* mng. 4a.

<sup>89</sup>For an illustration, see B. Janowski et al., *Gefährten und Feinde des Menschen: Das Tier in der Lebenswelt des alten Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), 242.

<sup>90</sup>For references, see *CAD* M/1 376; cf. A. Vivante's "The Sacrificial Altar in Assyrian Temples," *RA* 88 (1994), 163-168, which discusses *inter alia* the stone offering tables found in the Temple of the Sibitti at Khorsabad.

<sup>91</sup>So too in classical sacrifices, where bulls were frequent victims; for details, see H. Limet, "Le sacrifice sanglant," *WZKM* 86 (1996): 251-252.

<sup>92</sup>Bulls were *palāqu* 'd, lambs simply *tabāhu* 'd; for references, see *CAD* L 227-228, s.v. *lū* and *CAD* A/2 336, s.v. *aslu* A. For the use of *palāqu* in ritual context, see, e.g., *Racc.* 14 ii 16; A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium B.C. I (1114-859)*, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1991), 151:74.

<sup>93</sup>"He bellows like a bull which has been *palāqu* 'd with a *naplaqu*" (W. von Soden, "Der grosse Hymnus an Nabû," *ZA* 61 [1971]: 52-57). Note also Lie, Sg. 165, where an enemy's suicide by running into his sword is compared to the slaughtering of pigs. Sometimes, oxen are said to have been "struck (with a weapon)" (*mabāšu*); see, e.g., *Racc.* 120 r. 6.

<sup>94</sup>For representations on Sumerian seals depicting cattle on their backs having their throats slit during the course of ritual slaughter, see Limet, 254-255.

<sup>95</sup>*Racc.* 78 r. 8-12; Menzel, T 118 v 9-16, 17-23; T121/122 viii 14-24; cf. T 112:7-17, 22-23 (when salting the meat).

<sup>96</sup>See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 154, 716-718. To the Akkadian term for "sacrifice" (*nīqu naqū*), literally "to pour out the sacrifice as a libation," compare the Hebrew

the ancient Israelite equivalent of the *maškitu*: tables made of cut stone, upon which the holocausts were slaughtered.<sup>97</sup> Although, to my knowledge, no religious justification was given for the practice, great care also seems to have been taken in ancient Mesopotamia to get every last bit of blood out of butchered animals before cooking them (see below).

The sprinkling of the blood of a sacrificial animal could also, as may be seen from the use of the causative of “to accept” (*šumḫuru*) to describe it, be used to insure that the ancient Mesopotamian sacrifice got where it was going: “(In case of an eclipse in Arahšamna), let him sacrifice a sheep to Marduk and Šakkan; let him cause the blood to be accepted to the west.”<sup>98</sup> Note also the rubbing of blood and oil onto the upright stones in the course of the *zukurru*-festival at Emar.<sup>99</sup>

Where the deities being approached were chthonic (and had to be accessed via an *apū* or spring), this libatory aspect of the sacrifice is more than usually evident:<sup>100</sup> “He (the king) makes a sacrifice. . . . He goes (and) causes the blood to be accepted in the *apū*. He pours honey (and) oil into the *apū*. He pours beer (and) wine into it.”<sup>101</sup> “The king goes to the spring. He makes a sacrifice. He causes the blood to be accepted in the spring.”<sup>102</sup> “O Netherworld,” Etana complains, “you have drunk the blood of my sacrificial lambs!”<sup>103</sup>

Note also the practice of spattering foundation stones with the blood of a ram before setting them in their trenches,<sup>104</sup> and the sprinkling rite performed to avoid the ominous consequences of an eclipse in Kislimu: “You make a libation of water in front of the herds when the herds enter (the city). You sacrifice a sheep. You mix the blood from the cut (throat) with beer. The gate is sprinkled (with it). You burn *šigūšu*-barley all night in the south gate.”<sup>105</sup>

Most interesting is the parallel between Israelite treatment of the blood of sacrificial animals and another of the rites performed in connection with the Neo-Assyrian ritual *bīt rimki* (“bathhouse”): “The *āšipu* goes out the outer gate and sacrifices a ram [and an adult male goat] in the palace gate. With the blood

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expression “pouring out of blood” (*šāpak dām*) used of the “peace offerings” (ibid., 217).

<sup>97</sup>Ezek 40:39-43.

<sup>98</sup>P. Jensen, *KB* 6/2 44:26-27. Note also: “You cut (the throat) of a dove. You pour its blood [o]ver it (the buried figurine)” (BAM 323:63).

<sup>99</sup>Emar VI.3 no. 373:32, 57-58.

<sup>100</sup>Containers full of blood were rarely laid out for the gods alongside more conventional offerings (Walker and Dick, 46:116).

<sup>101</sup>Menzel, T 99/100 iii 7', 10'-12'.

<sup>102</sup>Menzel, T, 76 i 8'-9'.

<sup>103</sup>J. V. Kinnier Wilson, *The Legend of Etana* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1985), 100:133. See also Mayer and Sallaberger, 10:97.

<sup>104</sup>Parpola, SAA 10, no. 354:15-18.

<sup>105</sup>Jensen, 44:30-32.

of that adult male goat he [sprinkles] the thresh[hold], the . . . and the doorposts to the right and left of the palace gate."<sup>106</sup>

Note the striking similarity between this explicitly purificatory rite and the Israelite Passover sacrifice: "The lamb must be a year-old male and without blemish. You may take it from either the sheep or the goats. . . . They shall take some of its blood and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel of every house in which they partake of the ram."<sup>107</sup> "On the first day of the first month you shall use an unblemished young bull as a sacrifice to purify the sanctuary. Then the priest shall take some of the blood from the sin offering and put it on the doorposts of the temple, on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and on the doorposts of the gates of the inner court."<sup>108</sup>

### Preparation of the Sacrificed Animal in Mesopotamia

In divinatory sacrifices, the spirit of the sacrificed sheep was placated by sprinkling water on it. The head was removed and placed near an incense burner on the circle used in the ritual and sprinkled with water that had been aromatized with *Amanus cedar*.<sup>109</sup> The internal organs of the divinatory animal were then subjected to the diviner's autopsy, upon completion of which the flesh of the animal was available for cooking and eating.<sup>110</sup> For regular and occasional sacrifices, after the animal had been dispatched, the carcass was disarticulated and cooked. We have a description of this in what is, apparently, (in view of the absence of any invocation to a god or any other indication that an actual sacrifice is being described) an Old Babylonian butcher's manual.<sup>111</sup> Since boiled meat was the end result of the cooking process for daily and calendric sacrifices (see below), the procedure for these rites is likely to have been similar. The dead animal was beheaded and bled. At some point, it must also have been skinned, but our text neglects to mention this.<sup>112</sup> The hooves and tail were roasted (to facilitate removal of the marrow). The shoulder and rib cuts, having been removed and boiled, were ready to be served. The caul fat was washed and put raw on the table—doubtless to be cooked to the diner's taste just before eating (for an echo of this practice,

<sup>106</sup>BBR no. 26 iii 19-21.

<sup>107</sup>Exod 12:5, 7.

<sup>108</sup>Ezek 45:18-19.

<sup>109</sup>BBR nos. 84-86.

<sup>110</sup>For more details, see JoAnn Scurlock, "Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East*, ed. B. J. Collins (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 397-399.

<sup>111</sup>D. A. Foxvog, "A Manual of Sacrificial Procedure" in DUMU-É-DUB-BA-A: *Studies in Honor of Ake W. Sjöberg*, ed. H. Behrens et alia (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1989), 167-176.

<sup>112</sup>For the skinning of a sacrificial animal, see Farber, 57:20, 59:46; BBR no. 40:3.

see below). The intestines were checked over;<sup>113</sup> if satisfactory, they were pulled out for use and separated, the inedible connective tissue being removed.<sup>114</sup> The colon had the feces cleaned out of it (a must for decent flavor). The liver was checked over; if it was satisfactory, the remaining entrails (e.g., heart) were pulled out for use. The butcher was just in the process of cutting up the raw meat into bite-sized pieces (for boiling) when the text unfortunately breaks off. At Ur, the actual kitchens in which this process would have been carried out have been discovered in excavation.<sup>115</sup>

### *Regular Offerings*<sup>116</sup>

#### General Remarks

The reason for all this care taken in butchering and cooking sacrificial animals before presenting them to the gods was that both regular and occasional sacrifices were intended as divine meals. Ancient Mesopotamian deities expected to be fed twice a day,<sup>117</sup> without fail by their human worshipers, with extra luxurious fare during the "monthly offerings"<sup>118</sup> and the numerous festivals that enlivened the ancient Mesopotamian calendar. Generally, sacrificial animals were chosen from domesticated stock, excluding draft animals. Despite the fact that pigs were eaten in ancient Mesopotamia, they were rarely offered to the gods, the few exceptions to this rule tending to be in nocturnal or Netherworld contexts.<sup>119</sup>

Israelite and ancient Mesopotamian customs regarding regular offerings would seem to present the most extreme contrast possible. Indeed, it is hard to imagine there being much common ground between the ancient Mesopotamian custom of careful cooking and formal presentation of sacrificial animals, followed by redistribution of the leftovers on the one hand and the Israelite holocaust offering on the other. Appearances can, however, be deceptive.

<sup>113</sup>This does not mean that they were examined in the divinatory sense; in divinatory sacrifice, the liver would certainly have been examined first and the intestines last; whereas, in this case, the reverse is true.

<sup>114</sup>Cf. Parpola and Watanabe, SAA 2 no. 6:551-554. This part of the operation was at least potentially women's work—see Livingstone, SAA 3 no. 38: 46-49.

<sup>115</sup>See D. Charpin, *Le Clergé d'Ur au siècle d'Hammurabi* (Geneva, France: Librairie Droz, 1986), 336-340 (with plan).

<sup>116</sup>By this I mean offerings made on a regular (calendric) basis to confirm an ongoing relationship with a divinity.

<sup>117</sup>For references, see Mayer and Sallaberger, 10:95.

<sup>118</sup>That is, extra animals offered on specific days of every month, viz. new moon, full moon, and half way between. See W. Sallaberger, *Der kultische Kalender der Ur III-Zeit*, UAVA 7 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), part 1:37-96; Charpin, 307-318; *Racc.* 79 r. 32-34; CAD G 135-136, s.v. *guqqû*; cf. Blome, 63-65.

<sup>119</sup>For more details, see Scurlock, "Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Mesopotamia," 392-393.

Like their ancient Mesopotamian counterparts, Israelite holocaust offerings were imagined as divine meals,<sup>120</sup> presented twice daily at dawn and dusk,<sup>121</sup> with extra animals offered weekly on the Sabbath,<sup>122</sup> monthly at the new moon,<sup>123</sup> and annually on days set aside as festivals.<sup>124</sup> For the feast of booths alone, the total of extra animals came to 71 bullocks, 15 rams, 105 yearling lambs, and eight goats.<sup>125</sup> Since sacrifices were to be eaten, it stood to reason that the animals chosen for Israelite sacrifice should, as with their ancient Mesopotamian counterparts, have been animals that would have been suitable as food for humans,<sup>126</sup> namely domesticated stock,<sup>127</sup> excluding draft animals,<sup>128</sup> supplemented by lesser amounts of game (in the Israelite case, birds).<sup>129</sup>

The ancient Mesopotamian diet was considerably more varied than the Israelite, giving the gods a much more exciting selection of animals to choose from for their regular offerings. Although unusually restrictive, however, Israelite dietary laws<sup>130</sup> are paralleled by food taboos associated with specific ancient Mesopotamian divinities. For example, the god Šakkan refused to eat

<sup>120</sup>See G. A. Anderson, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT)," *ABD*, 5:878. For specific references to offerings as "food" for God, see Blome, 13; cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 250, 440 ("linguistic fossils").

<sup>121</sup>Exod 29:38-41; Lev 6:13; Num 28:3-8; cf. Exod 30:7-8; Lev 6:2; 9:16-17; Ezek 46:13-15; 2 Chron 31:3.

<sup>122</sup>Num 28:9-10; Ezek 46:4-5; cf. Ezek 45:17; 2 Chron 31:3. The Sabbath was also honored with special shewbread (Lev 24:5-9).

<sup>123</sup>Num 28:11-15; Ezek 46:6-7; cf. Ezek 45:17; Num 29:6; 2 Chron 31:3.

<sup>124</sup>Lev 23; Deut 16:1-17; Num 28:16-29, 39; Ezek 45:18-25; 46:11; cf. 2 Chron 31:3.

<sup>125</sup>Num 29:12-39.

<sup>126</sup>That is, "every clean animal and every clean bird" (Gen 8:20).

<sup>127</sup>Cattle: Exod 29:10, 35-36; Lev 1:3-5; 3:1; 4:3, 14; 8:14; 9:2-4; 16:11; 17:3; 22:19, 27; 23:18; 27:26; Num 7:87-88; 8:8; 15:8, 24; 19:2; 28:11, 19, 27; 29:2, 8, 13, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 36; Deut 16:2; 17:1; 18:3; Ezek 43:19, 23, 25; 45:18, 22-23; 46:6, 11; 2 Chron 29:21, 32-33; 30:24; 35:7-9. Sheep: Exod 12:3-5; 29:15, 19, 38-39; Lev 1:10; 3:6-7; 4:32; 5:6, 15, 18, 25; 8:18, 22; 9:2-4; 12:6; 14:10, 21; 16:3, 5; 17:3; 19:21; 22:19, 27; 23:12, 18-19; 27:26; Num 6:12, 14; 7:87-88; 15:5, 6; 28:3, 9, 11, 19, 27; 29:2, 8, 13, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 36; Deut 16:2; 17:1; 18:3; Ezek 43:23, 25; 45:15, 23; 46:4, 6, 11, 13; 2 Chron 29:21, 32-33; 30:15, 24; 35:1, 7-9. Goats: Exod 12:3-5; Lev 1:10; 3:6, 12; 4:23, 28; 5:6; 9:3; 16:5; 17:3; 22:19, 27; 23:19; Num 7:87-88; 15:5, 11, 24, 27; 28:15, 22, 30; 29:5, 11, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 38; Deut 16:2; Ezek 43:22, 25; 45:23; 2 Chron 29:21; 30:15; 35:1, 7-9.

<sup>128</sup>The firstborn of asses were doomed to the Lord; but, since they were not allowable for sacrifice, they had either to be redeemed or killed (Exod 34:19-20; cf. Num 18:15).

<sup>129</sup>Turtle doves or pigeons: Lev 1:14; 5:7; 12:6, 8; 14:21-22; 15:14-15, 29-30; Num 6:10-11. That these were (or could be) captured wild birds—and, therefore, not necessarily domesticated species—may readily be seen from the Rabbinic tale of Agrippa and the poor man's holocaust (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 166-167).

<sup>130</sup>Lev 11; Deut 14:3-21.

mutton, Ningublaga, beef, and Belet-seri, poultry. Ereškigal, dread goddess of the Netherworld, might accept a sheep or goat, but never ox meat or fowl.<sup>131</sup> A man going up to the temple of his god could touch a "dog of Gula" with impunity, but was advised not to have recently eaten leeks, *sablû*, garlic, onions, beef, or pork,<sup>132</sup> the latter meat being considered generally unsuitable for the divine table.

On specific days, designated in hemerologies, even normally allowable foods, such as roof rodents and fish, were off limits,<sup>133</sup> and in intercalary months, on every seventh day (plus a few extra days midmonth), meat cooked over coals, bread baked in ashes, or "anything which fire has touched" was not to be indulged in.<sup>134</sup> This last prohibition is particularly interesting in view of the Israelite Sabbath interdiction: "You shall not even light a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day."<sup>135</sup>

### Presentation

When a Mesopotamian divinity shared his temple with a host of minor gods and goddesses, as was often the case, it was assumed that all concerned would wish to eat together. Thus arrangements were made for regular and calendric sacrifices to be shared among them.<sup>136</sup> The meatiest sections naturally went to the most important god, with rib cuts and the like being reserved for the lesser lights.<sup>137</sup>

For regular and calendric sacrifices, each god's share was put on his table or tray, accompanied by bread, fruits, or vegetables, and whatever was on offer for the god to drink: "They sacrifice an ox and six sheep before the Storm God. They place be[ef] (and) mutton, the *parṣu* ("ritual portion")<sup>138</sup> before the god.

<sup>131</sup>*Racc.* 79 r. 40-42.

<sup>132</sup>C. J. Gadd, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum* (CT) (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1926), 39.38 r. 8, 11.

<sup>133</sup>For more details, see Scurlock, "Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Mesopotamia," 393-394.

<sup>134</sup>Jensen, 12 i 30, 14/16 ii 15, 41, 18/20 iii 3, 35; cf. Ch. Virolleaud, "Quelques textes cunéiformes inédits," *ZA* 19 (1905/6): 378:13.

<sup>135</sup>Exod 35:3; cf. Num 15:32-36.

<sup>136</sup>Note the stock phrase that offerings have been divided among the gods of Emar (Emar VI.3 nos. 369:19, 47-48, 87; 370:39-40; 385:11-12; 388:61-62, 66; 452:7; 463:4-6, 29-30). Note also the passing of Anu's and Ištar's trays to the other gods and/or goddesses in *Racc.* 90:25; and S. Lackenbacher, "Un nouveau fragment de la 'fête d'Ištar,'" *RA* 71 [1977]: 40:22-23; and the setting of Bel's golden offering table before Nabû when he arrives from Borsippa in *Racc.* 142/143:385-412.

<sup>137</sup>As, e.g., in the Middle Assyrian ritual for Adad, where specified cuts of the sheep sacrificed to the god went to Šala, Taramua, Kubu, and Anu (Menzel, T, 3 r. 7-11). Note also T 99/101 iii 7, 16-17, iv 21-22; T 102:8-9, 19.

<sup>138</sup>See D. E. Fleming, *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar*, HSS 42 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 137-140.

They place seven meal breads, seven dried breads (and) two dried breads with fruits before the gods. They fill cups with wine and beer.”<sup>139</sup> It is occasionally mentioned that meat offered to gods was first salted to make it more palatable.<sup>140</sup>

The morning and evening meals<sup>141</sup> had their own etiquette, which varied somewhat depending on whether this was an ordinary day or one associated with some festival. Normally, meals were left for a decent interval and then cleared away, doubtless to prevent their spoiling before they could be redistributed (see below); on special occasions, however, the food on the gods’ trays was left out overnight<sup>142</sup> (and presumably thrown away in the morning), as may be seen from the following description of the routine for the ninth and tenth days of the seventh-month *akītu*-festival of Anu at Uruk:

The big (meal of the morning) is cleared away and the small (meal) is offered; he fills the incense burner and the singers sing. . . . It is not cleared away. In the evening, it is cleared away and the big meal of the evening is offered. He fills the golden incense burner and makes sacrifices of oxen and sheep. The singers sing. The big (meal) is cleared away and the small (meal) is offered. The singers sing. . . . It is not cleared away (but) spends the night. The door is locked. . . . When day dawns, the door is unlocked and what has spent the night is cleared away and he brings water for washing. Oil is taken out. The big meal of the morning is offered. The singers sing. The big (meal) is cleared away and the small (meal) is offered. The small (meal) is cleared away and the big meal of the evening is offered. The singers sing.<sup>143</sup> The small (meal) of the evening is cleared away and the door is locked.<sup>144</sup>

In regular offerings and calendric rites of the Neo-Assyrian period, boiled meat (*silqu*) was typically offered to the gods.<sup>145</sup> The rare occasions on which roasted meat (*šumê*) is offered in calendric rituals suggest that this distinction

<sup>139</sup>Emar VI.3 no. 369:11-12, cf. nos. 369:27-28, 49-50; 370:45-47, 48-50, 51-53, 60-62, 63-65, 66-68; 385:5-7, 12-13, 29-34; 387:11-16; 388:2-3.

<sup>140</sup>BBR nos. 1-20:80, 83, 86; Menzel, T, 46:4-6; T 78 v 12'-13'; T 102:19-20; T 112:22, cf. 7-17.

<sup>141</sup>These were served at dawn and at dusk; see Charpin, 317.

<sup>142</sup>Note *Racc.* 79 r. 36-38, where “overnight” rites are mentioned alongside monthly offerings, “brazier,” “(purifications with) holy water basin,” “(new) clothing,” and “marriage” ceremonies, etc., in a list of offerings that occurred periodically throughout the year.

<sup>143</sup>Note the mention of singers in connection with divine meals in Old Akkadian Elam (I. J. Gelb and B. Kienast, *Altakkadischen Königsinschriften*, 325/326 ii 14-iii 2).

<sup>144</sup>*Racc.* 92/93 r. 3-14 (days 9-10); cf. 121 r. 28-31 (end of the festival).

<sup>145</sup>Note also M. Birot, “Fragment de rituel de Mari relatif au *kispu*,” in *Death in Mesopotamia: Papers Read at the XXVIe Rencontre assyriologique internationale*, Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology 8, ed. B. Alster (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), 142 i 11-12 (Old Babylonian Mariot *kispu* offerings); *Racc.* 79 r. 32-34 (late Babylonian monthly offerings).



was a way of marking a less important offering,<sup>146</sup> as to an object<sup>147</sup> or minor divinities, when an important god was also receiving offerings.<sup>148</sup>

More importantly, the presence of roasted rather than the usual boiled meat could symbolize the fact that the recipient was in transit at the time of the offering. Thus, for example, during the seventh-month *akītu*-festival of Anu at Uruk, the god ate roasted meat for the seven days he was in the *akītu*-house, and was offered hot roasted meat on his first day back in the courtyard of his temple as well.<sup>149</sup>

Although Israelite regular offerings took the form of holocausts, a certain amount of fuss was still made about the exact manner in which the meat was to be presented: "Then he shall skin the holocaust and cut it up into pieces. After Aaron's sons, the priests, have put some burning embers on the altar and laid some wood on them,<sup>150</sup> they shall lay the pieces of meat, together with the head and the fat, on top of the wood and embers on the altar."<sup>151</sup> The inner organs and shanks, however, the priest shall first wash with water. The priest shall then burn the whole offering on the altar as a holocaust."<sup>152</sup>

As in ancient Mesopotamia, the divine meal consisted mostly of meat, but cereal offerings<sup>153</sup> were also formally presented and libations of wine poured

<sup>146</sup>The Old Babylonian butcher's manual (see above) would seem to indicate that, even when the rest of the animal was being boiled, certain parts (viz. the hooves and tail) were still roasted. One might suppose that it was this sort of "roast" that was offered to objects and lesser divinities; however, the "roast" and the "boil" mentioned in calendric rites always seem to come from separate sheep; note Menzel, T, 100 iii 13'-14', where the king waits for them to finish roasting the meat before presenting his offering.

<sup>147</sup>Menzel, T, 99 ii 24-25 (a bed); T 100 iii 13-15 (a stool).

<sup>148</sup>As, e.g., the offering of roasted meat, which is placed in the *apū* for the Lisikutu gods (Menzel, T, 100 iii 16-21).

<sup>149</sup>*Racc.* 89:7-15, 90:22-25; cf. Lackenbacher, 71 40:19-21' (Ištar's *akītu*). Similarly with Marduk and Nabû at the *akītu* of the New Year's Festival (Livingstone, SAA 3 no. 34:50; no. 35:26; *Racc.* 142/143:385-412). The same encoding may apply to the offerings to Gula in Menzel, T, 102:14, 23, since the goddess receives first roasted and then boiled meat in the course of the ritual. Note also Menzel, T, 99 iii 14,22, where the goddess Ištar is "brought in" and then offered roasted meat, as well as the fact that the visiting Anu and Enlil (but not the resident Nergal and Ereškigal) are said to receive roasted meat in the Netherworld (Gilg VII iv 43).

<sup>150</sup>For details on the type of wood used, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 387-388; Hultgård, 87. In addition to being from one of the twelve correct varieties, the wood had to be worm-free, hard, clean, and not too old.

<sup>151</sup>Actually, the meat was thrown onto the altar from a safe distance; see Hultgård, 90.

<sup>152</sup>Lev 1:6-9, cf. 12-13; Exod 29:17-18; Lev 8:20-21; 9:13-14. Birds were also plucked, decropped, split down the middle, and flattened out (Lev 1:16-17). For more details on presentation, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 156-163, 169-172; cf. 240 (the location and archaeologically excavated contents of Jerusalem's ash heap).

<sup>153</sup>Exod 29:38-41; Lev 2:1-2, 8; 6:7-8; 9:3-4, 16-17; 14:10, 19-20, 21, 31; 23:12-13,

out.<sup>154</sup> On the Sabbath, two piles of six cakes each of baked shewbread were placed on the pure gold table before the Lord.<sup>155</sup> Salting of the meat (and cereal offerings) was mandatory.<sup>156</sup> To complete the meal-like atmosphere, the dark interior of the sanctuary was lit with olive oil lamps<sup>157</sup> and special incense<sup>158</sup> was burned at the morning and evening holocaust offerings.<sup>159</sup>

The most striking difference between this and ancient Mesopotamian gods' meals is not the method of presentation, but the comparative poverty of the offerings. If ancient Mesopotamian gods ate like modern Syrians, then the god of the Israelites ate like modern Mauritians. This was doubtless not an accident. According to Israelite tradition, their ancestors were originally seminomadic herdsman (like many modern Mauritians), and retaining in the offerings some features of that seminomadic past would be consistent not only with tradition, but with a more general principle that the food offered to spirits, and particularly remote and distant spirits (more usually ghosts or Netherworld gods) should be archaic.<sup>160</sup>

The Israelite evening holocaust was left on the hearth of the altar all night and not removed until the following morning.<sup>161</sup> As we have seen above, ancient Mesopotamian divine meals were, by contrast, left only for a decent interval and then cleared away, doubtless to prevent their spoiling before they could be redistributed. On special occasions, however, as for example on the ninth and tenth days of the seventh-month *akītu*-festival of Anu at Uruk, the

18, 37; Num 4:16; 6:14-15; 7:13, 19, 25, 31, 37, 43, 49, 55, 61, 67, 73, 79, 87; 15:3-4, 6, 8-9, 24; 28:3-5, 8, 9, 11-13, 19-21, 27-29, 31; 29:2-4, 6, 8-10, 11, 13-15, 16, 17-18, 19, 20-21, 22, 23-24, 25, 26-27, 28, 29-30, 31, 32-33, 34, 36-37, 38, 39; Ezek 45:23-24, 25; 46:4-5, 6-7, 11, 13-14, 15.

<sup>154</sup>Exod 29:38-41; Lev 23:12-13; Num 15:3-5, 6-7, 8-10; 28:7, 14; cf. Lev 23:18, 37; Num 6:14; 15:24; 28:8, 9, 10, 15, 24, 31; 29:6, 11, 16, 17-18, 19, 20-21, 22, 23-24, 25, 26-27, 28, 29-30, 31, 32-33, 34, 36-37, 38, 39. This could not, of course, be done in such a way as to extinguish the fire; for details, see Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary 4 (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 119; Hultgård, 90.

<sup>155</sup>Lev 24:5-6.

<sup>156</sup>Lev 2:13; Ezek 43:23-24; cf. Num 18:19 ("covenant of salt"; see Milgrom, *Numbers*, 154). See Levine, 13, for various opinions as to the significance of this requirement. The incense was also salted (Exod 30:35), as was the skin of the holocaust (*ApLev* 37; see Hultgård, 90).

<sup>157</sup>Exod 27:20-21; 30:7-8; Lev 24:1-4; Num 4:16; 8:1-4. The oil used in these lamps was of cooking rather than ordinary lamp grade; see Sarna, 175-176.

<sup>158</sup>The formula is given in Exod 30:34-38; see Milgrom, *Leviticus* 1-16, 236-238.

<sup>159</sup>Exod 30:7-8; cf. Num 4:16; 7:86.

<sup>160</sup>See J. Scurlock, "Ghosts in the Ancient Near East: Weak or Powerful?" *HUCA* 68 (1997): 87-90.

<sup>161</sup>Lev 6:2. For details on the procedure of removal, see Milgrom, *Leviticus* 1-16, 385-386.

food on ancient Mesopotamian gods' trays was left out overnight (and presumably thrown away in the morning). In this ceremony, what was the required pattern for biblical offerings seems to represent a transitional meal (day 9) between the roasted meat offerings of days one to eight (for which see below) and the normal routine that settles in on days ten and eleven. A similar leaving overnight occurred during the bonfire festival of Anu at Uruk.<sup>162</sup>

Interesting, therefore, in comparative perspective is to notice that, in both ancient Mesopotamian rites the leaving overnight of food appears in a context in which a god is in the process of being introduced into his sanctuary (from the *akītu* house in the case of the seventh-month ritual and from the heavens in the case of the bonfire festival). The fact that leaving overnight was standard in Israelite cult praxis would, then, seem to suggest that the Israelite Lord of Hosts, like the *kami* spirits of Japanese shrines, was not fully resident in his sanctuary, but had to be invited in to receive his offerings (and/or kept there) by means of a perpetual fire, as is described in the same passage from Leviticus:<sup>163</sup> "The holocaust is to remain on the hearth of the altar all night until the next morning, and the fire is to be kept burning on the altar. . . . The fire on the altar is to be kept burning; it must not go out."<sup>164</sup>

The contrast between regular and occasional offerings in Israel could not take the form of boiled versus roasted meat,<sup>165</sup> as in ancient Mesopotamia. Interesting to note, however, is the fact that the cereal offerings that accompanied the meat were different for the daily and calendric holocausts than they were for "peace" offerings. The former were always accompanied by fine flour mixed with olive oil and frankincense,<sup>166</sup> whereas the latter were presented with specially baked or fried, unleavened cakes and wafers (see below). An apparent exception is an otherwise troublesome passage in Leviticus, describing the priest's cereal offering that apparently accompanied the morning and evening holocausts.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>162</sup>Racc. 119:12-13, 121 r. 28-29.

<sup>163</sup>To the term *tamid*, used of this daily offering in Rabbinic sources, compare the ancient Mesopotamian offering term *ginū* "continual" (for references, see CAD G 80-82).

<sup>164</sup>Lev 6:2, 6; cf. 6:5. The sanctuary's oil lamps were also kept burning all night (Exod 27:20-21; Lev 24:1-4), a pillar of smoke by day and of fire by night (cf. Exod 40:38; Num 9:15), signaling the presence of YHWH in his sanctuary; see Sarna, 176.

<sup>165</sup>Note, however, that one of the etymologies for the term used to describe the ancient Israelite holocaust offering would link it to the Arabic *ghy* ("to boil"); see Gaster, 154.

<sup>166</sup>Exod 29:40-41; Lev 6:7-8; 9:4; 14:10, 21; 23:12-13; Num 7:13, 19, 25, 31, 37, 43, 49, 55, 61, 67, 73, 79; 15:3-4, 6, 8-9; 28:3-5, 9, 11-13, 19-21, 27-29; 29:2-4, 8-10, 13-15; Ezek 45:23-24; 46:4-5, 6-7, 11, 13-14, 15. The exact preparation is described in Lev 2:1-3. The presence of the oil and frankincense helped to distinguish between this and the substitute "sin" offering of flour (Lev 5:11-13); see Levine, 29-30; Hultgård, 87.

<sup>167</sup>Lev 6:13-16. This passage has caused much difficulty of interpretation; see Levine, 34, 38-39; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 396-401. According to the *Tamid*, which envisages nine priests to carry various parts of the offering, the seventh priest is to carry the cereal offering and the ninth the libation accompanying the holocaust, whereas the

Perhaps at least a partial explanation for this is that the griddle cakes, which the priest was to crumble and burn in their entirety, were a private offering, designed to make the leftovers of the regular (flour) cereal offering, described in the immediately preceding passage, lawful for him to eat.<sup>168</sup>

Also one of the exceptions to the general rule of boiled meat in regular and calendric offerings in ancient Mesopotamia, namely, the fact that, during the seventh-month *akītu*-festival of Anu at Uruk, the god ate roasted meat for the seven days he was in the *akītu*-house and was offered hot roasted meat on his first day back in the courtyard of his temple, as well<sup>169</sup> accords quite well with Israelite offering encoding.

When the offering meat was to be cooked and eaten by the priests or sacrificers in or near sacred ground, Israelite protocol invariably demanded boiling: "You shall take the flesh of the ordination ram and boil it in a holy place. At the entrance of the meeting tent Aaron and his sons shall eat of the flesh of the lamb and the bread that is in the basket."<sup>170</sup> To this rule, there was only one exception and that was the requirement that the Passover lamb, which people were supposed to eat "like those who are in flight," be roasted rather than boiled.<sup>171</sup> If, as seems probable, the reason that roasted meat was offered to the gods in ancient Mesopotamia in occasional sacrifices is that these rites were not performed in the god's house (the temple), as with regular and calendric rites, but were typically carried out in places in which the relatively "uncivilized" technique of spit-roasting meat over an open fire would seem naturally appropriate (see below), then the principle governing the choice of which type of meat to use was not dissimilar between ancient Mesopotamia and Israel.

### Holocaust Offerings in Mesopotamia

A little-known fact is that there were, particularly in the late periods, a number of ancient Mesopotamian rites that required an entire animal to be consumed as a holocaust offering: "For *dību*, *šibtu* and plague not to approach the hor[ses and] soldiers of the king . . . [y]ou heap up a brush pile. You load on *e<sup>2</sup>ru*-hardwood and *āšagu*-thorn. On top you bind a virgin lamb. . . . You ignite the [fir]e."<sup>172</sup> A similar fate presumably awaited the "sheep for burning," mentioned in a late Babylonian text, recording the paraphernalia needed for an

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eighth carries the separate cereal offering of the high priest (see Hultgård, 89-90).

<sup>168</sup>Rabbinic tradition indicates that the evening offering of griddle cakes was the last offering of the day (see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 399), which would position it temporally between the regular flour offering and the consumption of the ritual leftovers.

<sup>169</sup>*Racc.* 89:7-15, 90:22-25; cf. Lackenbacher, 71.40:19-21' (Ištar's *akītu*). Similarly with Marduk and Nabû at the *akītu* of the New Year's Festival (Livingstone, SAA 3 no. 34:50; no. 35:26; *Racc.* 142/143:385-412).

<sup>170</sup>Exod 29:31-32; cf. Lev 8:31; Num 6:19; Ezek 46:20, 24.

<sup>171</sup>Exod 12:8-9, 11.

<sup>172</sup>R. Caplice, *OrNS* 39 118/119 no. IX:1-2, 15-16, 36-37.

unspecified ritual, probably *bīt rimki*.<sup>173</sup>

In some cases, at least, the animal seems to have been slaughtered before burning. Part of the late Babylonian builders' ritual for a house called for an immolation on the roof: "You ignite a brush pile of sweet reed on top of four bricks. You smear the neck of a red lamb with cedar resin<sup>174</sup> and then you cut (its throat). You dress (it) in a white garment and then you burn it."<sup>175</sup> The offerings that precede the holocaust indicate that the Sibitti (i.e., the Pleiades) were the intended recipients.<sup>176</sup> To accompany a "hand-raising" prayer directed to another astral divinity, the moon god Sîn, what appears to be a similarly humane holocaust offering was also contemplated: "At night, in the presence of Sîn, you sweep off the roof. You [sprinkle] pure water. You pile up a brush pile. You arrange seven emmer breads on top of the brush pile. You disarticulate a pure lamb which is not black.<sup>177</sup> 3 *qû* of [fl]our which a man has ground, 1 *qû* of salt. . . . You fill seven jugs with honey, ghee, wine, [be]er and water and heap them on top of the brush pile. You pour out a libation of *mibbu*-beer."<sup>178</sup>

As a holocaust offering was an expensive sort of sacrifice, allowances had to be made when someone other than the king was expected to perform it: "If (the sponsor of the divinatory sacrifice) is a prince, he burns a dove as a burnt offering; if he is a poor man, he burns the heart of a sheep."<sup>179</sup> The person cured of *sabarsubbû*, another probable charity case, was to burn a shelduck and a crab before Šamaš.<sup>180</sup>

Holocausts also appear as part of calendric rites. For example, as part of the Late Babylonian New Year's festival, an ox seems to have been, literally, torched: "In the great courtyard, they open up a pit, and he puts into the pit forty straight reeds of three cubits each, which have been neither cut nor broken and which he has tied into a bundle with a palm frond.<sup>181</sup> He puts in honey, ghee, pure oil (and). . . . They . . . a white ox be[fo]re the planet

<sup>173</sup>von Weiher, *SpTU* 4 no. 128:75; see below. The reference is perhaps to the point in the ritual in which the officiant is to "burn the [sh]eep of the brush pile" (*BBR* no. 26 ii 25).

<sup>174</sup>Literally the "blood" of the cedar, an obvious signal that the appearance of the lamb's blood was desired.

<sup>175</sup>von Weiher, *SpTU* 2 no. 17 iv 14-16.

<sup>176</sup>There were seven thrones, seven white cloths, seven red cloths, seven reed altars, seven emmer breads and seven *namzitu* vessels, one for each of the "Seven Gods" (von Weiher, *SpTU* 2 no. 17 iv 9-13).

<sup>177</sup>One of the meanings of the color black was to signal an eclipse; since the moon god was being addressed in this sacrifice, such a color would give an entirely wrong message.

<sup>178</sup>E. Ebeling, *MVAG* 23/1 (1918) 15/16 iii 13-19; cf. also *BAM* 580 vi 17'-20'.

<sup>179</sup>Menzel, *T*, 109 r. 6-7.

<sup>180</sup>Tsukimoto, 199-200:88.

<sup>181</sup>These represent the enemies of Marduk as is revealed by a Neo-Assyrian cultic commentary: "The bundle of reeds which one prepares is Bel, treading on the necks of his . . . relentless enemies" (Livingstone, *SAA* 3, no. 38: 10-11).

Mercury].<sup>182</sup> The king [introduces] an ignited fire into it by means of a reed. The king and . . . [say] this *naqbitu*-prayer: 'Shining Mercury'<sup>183</sup> that brigh[tens] the darkness . . . ] burner of Anu."<sup>184</sup>

Such holocausts are not uncommon in Neo-Assyrian calendric rites: "He (the Assyrian king) sets up an offering table. He makes sacrifices. He offers the boiled meat. . . . He burns a virgin she goat."<sup>185</sup> The same is true of Middle Babylonian Emar: "They (the Emariots) make a *kubadu*-offering of a ewe . . . before the Battle Gate; they burn that one ewe for all the gods."<sup>186</sup> "In the night, they bu[rn] one bird, water, honey (and) ghee."<sup>187</sup> In the "Anatolian" rituals from Emar, adult male goats were consumed in some quantity, along with bread (and) sometimes beer and wine as well.<sup>188</sup> Most importantly, in Assyria at least, holocausts were included among the daily offerings. A Neo-Assyrian royal grant records the setting aside of "twenty-three sheep, two oxen, two calves for the incense burners, for the burnt offerings of morning and evening."<sup>189</sup> This last usage of the holocaust is the closest equivalent to the Israelite "burnt offering" (*ʿolā*). Interesting, therefore, from a comparative perspective, is the fact that we possess a Neo-Assyrian cultic commentary that indicates that such holocaust offerings were understood to please the gods by symbolically destroying their enemies: "The [brazie]r which is lighted in front of Mulissu, and the sheep which they throw on the brazier and which the fire

<sup>182</sup>The name of the planet Mercury is *šibtu* from *šabātu*, for which the Sumerogram is GU<sub>4</sub>.UD. Taken another way, however, the Sumerogram could mean "white ox" (GU<sub>4</sub>.BABBAR), hence the choice of offering.

<sup>183</sup>The interpretation follows J. A. Black, "The New Year Ceremonies in Ancient Babylon: 'Taking Bel by the Hand' and 'A Cultic Picnic,'" *Religion* 11 (1981): 45, 51, but it should be noted that the copy has a clear ZĀLAG in line 461 where an UD would be required.

<sup>184</sup>*Racc.* 145/146:454-462.

<sup>185</sup>Menzel, T, 60 vi 25-27; cf. T 77 ii 5-9; T 80/81 i 3-5, vi 5-6; T 34 iv 17, 19.

<sup>186</sup>Emar VI.3 no. 373:33-35, cf. 59-60; no. 446:90-91. Compare the sheep that are "turned into smoke" as part of a first-millennium Aramaic ritual (Steiner apud Cohen, 452).

<sup>187</sup>Emar VI.3 no. 463:9; cf. no. 446:98.

<sup>188</sup>Emar VI.3 nos. 471:29-33; 472:16-18, 23-24, 27-29, cf. 14-15. If Cohen's interpretation of NĪG.GIŠ.TAG.GA as "burnt offering" is correct, the earliest attestation of such "burnt offerings" in Mesopotamia would be at Umma in the Ur III period (see Cohen, 165, 171 [oxen]; 174, 181, 190 [vegetarian]). Note, however, that this interpretation is disputed (Mayer and Sallaberger, 10:100).

<sup>189</sup>Kataja and Whiting, SAA 12 no. 48:10-11; cf. *ABL* 606 r. 2-6, 648:6-r. 6. Note also: "They place the *paršu* ox and the *paršu* six sheep on the incense burner which is before Iškur" (Emar VI.3 no. 369:37; cf. nos. 370:23-26; 385:12-13; 394:29; Menzel, T, 54 no. 33: 4-7; T 62 vii 44-48; T 64 viii 30-42). For further references, see *CAD* M/1 252a s.v., *maqlūtu* mng. 2; *CAD* Q 70-71 s.v., *qalū* mng. 3; *CAD* Š/2: 51 s.v. *šarāpu* mng. 1d and *CAD* Š/3: 373 s.v. *šuruptu* mng. 2.

burns, is Qingu when they burn [him] in the fire.<sup>190</sup> The torches which he lights from the brazier are merciless arrows from the quiver of Marduk. . . . The king, who wears his jewelry and burns up virgin she-goats is Marduk who, wearing his armor, bur[ned] the sons of Illil and Anu in the fire.”<sup>191</sup> To be noted in this connection is the expression, which is almost invariably used to describe holocaust offerings in Israel and which literally means “a soothing odor to Yahweh.”<sup>192</sup>

This by no means excludes the argument of Baruch Levine that holocaust offerings were designed to attract the attention of YHWH to the needs of his human worshipers.<sup>193</sup> On the contrary, we have already argued (see above) that the ancient Israelite deity may not have been fully resident in his sanctuary, but had to be invited in to receive his offerings (and/or kept there) by means of a perpetual fire. Perhaps significant in this regard is the technical term conventionally translated as “token offering” (*azkarah*) on the strength of a supposed connection with Akkadian *zikru* B: “image, counterpart, replica.”<sup>194</sup> The considerably more common *zikru* A: “words, mention, name” derives from *zakāru*, meaning (*inter alia*) “to invoke,”<sup>195</sup> allowing for an alternative interpretation of *azkarah* as (“invocation offering”). This, in turn, allows for a direct association between what Levine terms “rites of attraction” and Israelite burnt offerings, since the “token” offering (see below) was almost invariably burnt.

<sup>190</sup>Note Menzel, T, 64 viii 30-32. For instance, “(When) there is too much firewood at his breast, he appeals to Šamaš. Thus says the lord of everything (EN ŠU) Qingu: ‘Will he bind me and burn me? Why do they now bring me before Nusku?’” (A. Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986] 169).

<sup>191</sup>Livingstone, SAA 3 no. 37:9-12, 16-17.

<sup>192</sup>See Hultgård, 91. This translation is dismissed by Milgrom on the usual grounds that, although the Akkadian cognate to *nibāb*, namely *nubbu*, indisputably refers to “appeasing, placating, soothing,” in Hebrew this is a frozen expression whose original meaning has been forgotten (*Leviticus* 1-16: 162-163, 252). The problem is that this formulation sounds to Milgrom uncomfortably like “magic,” a connection which he seeks to deny. For the relevance of the Akkadian cognate, see also Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 2:696. In addition to the holocaust offering, the expression is also used of the *šelāmim* and once of the “sin” offerings, but never of the “guilt” offerings, which were designed to expiate offenses that were primarily sins against man rather than sins against god; see below.

<sup>193</sup>Levine, 5-6. This is seconded by Jonathan Klawans, “Pure Violence: Sacrifice and Defilement in Ancient Israel,” *HTR* 94 (2001): 151-156.

<sup>194</sup>See Levine, 10; Milgrom, *Leviticus* 1-16, 181-182.

<sup>195</sup>See *CAD* Z 16-22.

### Leftovers of the Sacrifice

In ancient Mesopotamian regular sacrifices, food was prepared and presented to the gods, who took only the essence, leaving the remainder<sup>196</sup> to be divided up among the temple personnel. Who, exactly, got what could get very complicated, but care was taken to see to it that none was wasted.<sup>197</sup>

Nabu-apla-iddina, king of Babylon, for the sake of Šamaš, Aya and Bunene, established a portion, the king's share (of the offerings), as food ration for the *šangû* (of their temple). From the sheep from the king's sacrifices for the whole year, a leg, the hide, the back section, the tendons, half of the stomachs, half of the intestines, two fetlocks and a bowl of meat broth. . . . Nabu-apla-iddina, king of Babylon gave as a gift to Nabu-nadin-šumi, *šangû* of Sippar, the diviner, his servant.<sup>198</sup>

In Assyria, where the king was also high priest, sacrificial leftovers served not only to feed various temple personnel, but also to supply the palace table with meat. A set of documents found in the palace of Aššurbanipal at Nineveh record the distribution of "leftovers" (*rebtu*) of sacrificial meals from the Aššur temple, which consisted of a wide variety of foodstuffs: cuts of beef and mutton, fowl, stomachs, livers, kidneys, hearts, chick peas, onions, sesame, olives, meat broth, spices, at least four types of bread, milk, wine, and flavored beers (of which the goddess Mulissu seems to have been especially fond), and various types of sweets and fruits, especially quinces.<sup>199</sup>

Even in Babylonia, where the king was not high priest, it was the custom, from at least the Old Babylonian period on,<sup>200</sup> for him to receive a share of certain sacrificial offerings.<sup>201</sup> It followed that giving "the king's share" to a person was a way of acknowledging that person as king. By the Neo-Assyrian period, it was possible for the prominent cult centers of Babylonia to acknowledge their submission to Assyria by the simple

<sup>196</sup>These were referred to as "leftovers" (cf. *CAD* R 340 s.v. *rebtu* mng. 2).

<sup>197</sup>On these points, see esp. Charpin, 303-325 (Old Babylonian Ur). There is no longer any excuse for quoting the virulently polemical *Apochrophon of Bel and the Dragon* (Lambert, 55, 200) as evidence for ancient Mesopotamian cult praxis. On this point, also Mayer and Sallaberger, 10:98.

<sup>198</sup>*BBS* no. 36 v 3-15, vi 9-13. Note also the more complete listing from the Eanna temple in Uruk from the same reign: G. J. P. McEwan, "Distribution of Meat in Eanna," *Iraq* 45 (1983): 187-198; cf. Emar VI.3 no. 369:89-94.

<sup>199</sup>Fales and Postgate, SAA 7 nos. 182-219; cf. Kataja and Whiting, SAA 12 nos. 68, 77, 78, 81; Menzel, T, 97.

<sup>200</sup>There is a single document from the Ur III period (*BIN* 2 304) that would seem to indicate that leftovers of sacrificial animals were already being eaten by royal officials at this time (reference and interpretation of this text are courtesy M. Hilgert).

<sup>201</sup>See J. R. Kupper, "Le rituel *elūnum*," *NABU* 1996 no. 32; cf. idem, "*anumma zittaki*," *NABU* 1996 no. 130. This practice was still in evidence under the Neo-Babylonian kings; see P. A. Beaulieu, "Cuts of Meat of King Nebuchadnezzar," *NABU* 1990 no. 93.



expedient of formally handing over sacrificial leftovers.<sup>202</sup>

Enterprising citizens of Old Babylonian Ur<sup>203</sup> and Late Babylonian Uruk sold entitlements to shares of the benefits of minor temple offices, such as butcher and courtyard sweeper on the open market:

Rubuttu, daughter of Anu-uballiṭ, son of Nidintu-Anu . . . has sold one thirtieth(?) of a day per day from day one to day five (and) one ninth of a day per day from day six to day [x], her share of the *ērib bitūti* prebend before Anu, Antu, Papsukkal, Ištar, Belet-šeri and all the gods of their temples (plus) one twelfth of a day per day from day one to day fifteen, her share of the *ērib bitūti* prebend before Enlil, Papsukkal, Nanay, Belet-reš, Šarrahitu and all the gods of their temples (plus) one fifth and one thirty-sixth of a day per day on days twenty-three and twenty-four, her share of the *ērib bitūti* and butcher's prebend in Egalmah, the temple of Gula . . . and all the gods of her temple (plus) her portion (consisting of) two cuts of cooked or raw meat on day one, six cuts of cooked or raw meat on days ten, eleven and twelve, and one cut of cooked or raw meat on day twenty-seven from the sheep which come up on those days to that temple to the table of the Mistress of the Land (Gula) (plus) her portion (consisting of) hulled barley, six *takkasū* pastries, oil, thirty Dilmun dates, and a leg of mutton on day thirteen together with a back portion from the *pēt bābi* festival which come up to the table of Anu and Antu (plus) her portion (consisting of) one cut of cooked or raw meat from the sheep which come up on day four to the table of Belet-šeri (plus) her portion of the cooked or raw meat from the sheep which come up on day thirteen to the table of Papsukkal and Belet-šeri, a total of three fifths of that meat (plus) her portion (consisting of) one half of a thigh from the lamb which comes up on day three to the table of Ištar (plus) her portion (consisting of) one twenty-eighth of the ducks which come up on every *ešeššu* festival to the table of Nanay and her portion (consisting of) one half of a sheep which comes up on every *ešeššu* festival to the table of the statues of kings, these portions, monthly, for the whole year . . . for one mina of pure silver in staters of Demetrius as its full price to Anu-zera-iddin, son of Anu-uballiṭ, son of Anu-zer-iddin, etc.<sup>204</sup>

Even assuming Rubuttu to have been a very ample personage indeed, and one who ate red meat every day of the year in defiance of hemerologies, she can hardly have consumed so much by herself. The excess presumably went to feed her family, servants, dependents, or was resold to other persons. As the small fractions of shares indicate, however, there was nothing to prevent prebends from consisting of more manageable portions as in a Neo-Babylonian sale of "one ox head (and) one sheep's head, the revenue of his prebend from before Išhara."<sup>205</sup>

<sup>202</sup>For references to such incidents under Adad-Nirari III, Tiglath-Pileser III, and Sargon II, see H. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences & Humanities, 1994), 86-87.

<sup>203</sup>See Charpin, 251-269; for actual examples of such sales see, e.g., 174-175, 178-179, 180-182, 190-191.

<sup>204</sup>G. J. P. McEwan, *Priest and Temple in Hellenistic Babylonia*, FAOS 4 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1981), 76/77:1-23.

<sup>205</sup>F. E. Peiser, *Babylonische Verträge der Berliner Museums* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard,

On festival days, the increased quantity of offerings was balanced by a corresponding widening of the circle of those allowed to eat from the god's table. Minimally, those performing special work<sup>206</sup> or helping to carry the gods' emblems in procession,<sup>207</sup> as well as the festival sponsors, got to take home sacrificial leftovers.<sup>208</sup> Maximally, all of the inhabitants of the god's city or city quarter got a chance to feast. At Emar, during the *kizzu*-festival of Išhara and Ninurta, "the men and women of the city, whoever they may be, take (some of the bread) [from] before them."<sup>209</sup> In Neo-Assyrian Kalḫu, during the marriage feast of Nabû in Ayyaru, "anybody who brings an offering of as little as one *qû* of bread may eat in the temple of Nabû."<sup>210</sup>

Ordinary worshipers also participated in calendric sacrifices in other ways. The cella of an ancient Mesopotamian temple was too small to accommodate large numbers of people; on festival days, therefore, the crowd that assembled in the temple courtyard to witness the festivities were treated to a periodic appearance of the officiant: "He (the king) makes a sacrifice. He burns honey (and) oil. He finishes his *maqû*-bowl. He is seen (by the people)."<sup>211</sup> Where the sacrifice was out in the open and water was offered for the gods to wash, the people in attendance on the rite might be sprinkled with some of it.<sup>212</sup> At the end of the ceremony, Neo-Assyrian ritual instructions sometimes mention the

1890), nos. 96 + 123:8-9.

<sup>206</sup>As, e.g., the craftsmen who manufactured figurines required for the late Babylonian New Year's festival at Babylon (*Racc.* 132/133:196-200). Note also the slave girl, the pastry cooks, and the potter required by Emariot rituals (Emar VI.3 nos. 387:20-21; 388:11-13, 68-69); cf. van Driel, 202 r. 12'-14' (two scribes and a cook).

<sup>207</sup>As in the Middle Assyrian festival for Adad, where the *qadištu*-women got a share of the sacrificial meat (Menzel, T, 3 r. 12).

<sup>208</sup>See, e.g., Emar VI.3 nos. 369:12-14, 38-39, 53-55, 61, 69-71, 78-79, 81-82; 370:55-58; 385:14, 24, 36-38; 387:22-23; 388:60-61, 64-65; 394:36-38; 446:20-22, 33-38, 60, 78-80, 103-104, 116. Officiating temple personnel and the king also got their shares; see, e.g., Emar VI.3 nos. 369:55-59, 75-76, 79-87; 370:33-36, 59, 111-114; 385:16-18; 388:57-58, 62-63, 67; 394:23-25, 41-44; 446:27-28, 38-39, 44, 51-53, 74-75, 80-81, 93-94, 101, 104, 108-109; 447:3-5.

<sup>209</sup>Emar VI.3, no. 387:18-19; cf. nos. 370:32-33, 110 (the troops); 472:73-74.

<sup>210</sup>*ABL* 65 r. 8-9 (see E. Matsushima, *ASJ* 9:133; cf. Cohen, 312). Note also a festival celebrated by the Ur III monarch Šulgi, where, it has been estimated, enough beer was mustered to have satisfied the thirst of 45,000 persons to the tune of four liters of beer per day for each of the four days of the festival (D. O. Edzard, "Private Frömmigkeit in Sumer" in *Official Cult and Popular Religion in the Ancient Near East*, ed. E. Matsushima [Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1993], 198).

<sup>211</sup>Menzel, T, 99/100 iii 7'-9'.

<sup>212</sup>*Racc.* 90:22-23, 91 r. 3-4, 102 iii 17-18, 103 iv 11-12, 115 r. 8; Lackenbacher, 41:31-32, 46:26.

polite removal (*passukū*) of this crowd of onlookers.<sup>213</sup>

Although YHWH is also described as imbibing the essence of the holocaust,<sup>214</sup> one might have thought that there would have been no leftovers from Israelite daily offerings to divide. However, the hide of the holocaust was the prerogative of the priest who made the offering.<sup>215</sup> The cereal offerings that accompanied the holocaust were also meant, with the exception of the frankincense and a handful of the flour and oil, which were burned as a "token" offering,<sup>216</sup> to be consumed by the priests, although in this case the officiant could not take all of it for himself, but had to share with his colleagues.<sup>217</sup> The priests were to make this flour into unleavened cakes and to eat them in a sacred place.<sup>218</sup>

The shewbread, with the exception of the frankincense that was placed on it, was also a prerogative of the sons of Aaron.<sup>219</sup> The king of Israel was not a priest and should not, theoretically, have had any entitlement to the leftovers of regular offerings.<sup>220</sup> Nonetheless, the fury of Saul when Ahimelech allowed

<sup>213</sup>See, e.g., Menzel, T, 99 ii 10; T 101 iv 15'.

<sup>214</sup>"When the Lord smelled the soothing odor, he said to himself, 'Never again will I doom the earth because of man'" (Gen 8:21).

<sup>215</sup>Lev 7:8.

<sup>216</sup>Lev 2:1-3; 6:7-11; 9:17; cf. Ezek 44:29; Lev 2:14-16 (first fruits); Num 5:25-26 (cereal offering of jealousy). Milgrom explains this custom of partial burning of the holocaust cereal offering as an attempt to differentiate properly Yahwist worship from popular and heterodox practices allegedly consisting of completely burnt cereal offerings introduced from Assyria and intended for the goddess Ištar (*Leviticus 1-16*, 201-202). He seems to have forgotten that "every cereal offering of a priest shall be a whole burnt offering; it may not be eaten" (Lev 6:16), a passage that follows on the heels of instructions to burn only a handful of the cereal offering flour as a "token" offering (Lev 6:8). If an original, totally burnt offering was changed to a partial burning to avoid "rampant idolatry," would not the priest's personal offering have been the first to be changed?

<sup>217</sup>Lev 7:9-10. Although it was only fair that the officiating priest should be paid for his services, some sharing was necessary, since Levites who had the misfortune to be imperfect could not actually officiate in person at sacrifices (Lev 21:17-23). Milgrom argues that the unshared cooked cereal offerings (and thigh of the "peace" offerings—see below) represent the cultic praxis of older non-Jerusalemite sanctuaries, which was ultimately combined with the younger Jerusalemite praxis of shared uncooked cereal offerings (and breast of the "peace" offerings) after the centralization of the cult (*Leviticus 1-16*, 183-184, 412, 435-436, 480-481). That the temple in Jerusalem with its large staff should have insisted on the sharing of offerings and have preferred as a meat cut the much larger breast is understandable. However, that this complex, which actually possessed kitchens, should have offered cereal raw to YHWH when little local shrines without kitchens offered it cooked or, for that matter, that raw flour mixed with frankincense and oil should have been considered an appropriate offering to an almighty god except on the grounds of ancestral praxis is hard to imagine.

<sup>218</sup>Lev 6:9; 10:12-13.

<sup>219</sup>Lev 24:7-9.

<sup>220</sup>Ezek 45:17 requires him to provide the regular offerings; Ezek 46:12 allows him

David to eat the shewbread<sup>221</sup> suggests that the priest's action, like the donation of the sword of Goliath that accompanied it,<sup>222</sup> was a symbolic acknowledgment of David's right to the throne (as indeed the equivalent action would have been in ancient Mesopotamia).<sup>223</sup>

On festival days in Israel, as in Mesopotamia, it was possible for ordinary persons to participate in the ritual as bystanders: "Thrice a year (Passover, Weeks, and Booths) shall all your men appear before the Lord God."<sup>224</sup> Ordinary persons were not allowed to enter the Holy of Holies under any circumstances; what was contemplated was access to the altar of burnt offerings in the courtyard.<sup>225</sup> Also once a year, ancient Israelite worshipers were allowed to partake of the sacrifice; at Passover, every household was to eat the roasted flesh of a lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.<sup>226</sup>

### *Interim Conclusion*

We have been examining the sacrificial systems of ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East in comparative perspective in the hope that the why's and why not's of each system may be better understood by putting the beliefs and practices of ancient Israelites back into their original context.

The sex of the animal used for regular or occasional sacrifice in ancient Mesopotamia was usually the same as that of the deity receiving the offering. Moreover, the term used for "ritual cleansing" is cognate to the Akkadian *kuppuru*, which specifically refers to the "magical" transfer of problems from a human patient to a surrogate by means of direct physical contact. In contrast to the situation with contagious diseases, a transferred ill did not simply infect the recipient, but was actually drawn into the recipient, leaving the patient free and clear (and the recipient somewhat damaged) in the process.

Once transferred to the sacrificial animal, the sin, guilt, or other problem of the Israelite sacrificer was subsequently transferred to the sanctuary in the course of the sacrifice. It was this practice of transferring human problems to divinities (also attested in ancient Mesopotamia) that necessitated an annual purification of the Israelite sanctuary in the Ritual of Atonement.

the singular privilege of entering the temple complex to make his freewill offerings.

<sup>221</sup>1 Sam 21:2-8, 22:11-18.

<sup>222</sup>1 Sam 21:9-10.

<sup>223</sup>As pointed out by Magnus Ottosson, as part of Saul's anointment as king of Israel by Samuel, Saul was made to eat the leg, i.e., the priest's share of a sacrificial meal ("Sacrifice and Sacred Meals in Ancient Israel" in *Gifts to the Gods, Proceedings of Uppsala Symposium, 1985*, ed. Tullia Linders and Gullög Nordquist [Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987], 135-136).

<sup>224</sup>Exod 23:14-17; 34:18, 22-24; Deut 16:16-17.

<sup>225</sup>Ezek 46:9.

<sup>226</sup>Exod 12:3-11; Num 9:11-12; cf. Deut 16:2-3.

Even with regular holocaust offerings, ostensibly the most distinctively non-Mesopotamian part of ancient Israelite sacrificial practices, parallels allow for greater understanding or serve to confirm observations made on other bases. Thus the holocaust was indeed intended as a food offering. Moreover, the Israelite Lord of Hosts was not fully resident in his sanctuary, but had to be invited in to receive his offerings (and/or kept there by means of a perpetual fire). More significantly, the fact that the Assyrian god Aššur received twice daily holocaust offerings allows us to understand, via Neo-Assyrian cultic commentaries, that holocaust offerings were understood to please gods by symbolically destroying their enemies. (To be concluded.)