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**Sacrifice in Genesis 22:
literal polemic or literary construct**

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and research in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the role of human sacrifice within the narrative of Genesis 22: 1-19. For several decades, biblical scholarship has interpreted the role of human sacrifice within this particular narrative as an established and accepted practice, which was, only later abolished and replaced by the Law of Redemption (Ex 22:29-30). This thesis will study the archaeological data surrounding the practice of ritual human sacrifice in the expectation that it will provide added insight into the meaning of the ritual act within the narrative of Genesis 22.

The study will also investigate the use of ritual offerings as a symbolic code and as a literary construct to transmit the interests and concerns of the author. These concerns were generated by specific political, social and religious realities brought about by the events surrounding the Babylonian and Persian invasions of the Syria-Palestine region.

RÉSUMÉ DE THÈSE

L'objectif de cette thèse est d'étudier le rôle du rituel de sacrifice humain dans le récit du livre de Genèse 22 : 1-19. Pendant plusieurs décennies, des spécialistes des études bibliques ont interprétés ce rôle comme étant un rituel établi et accepté et qui, plus tard, fût abolit et remplacé par La loi de Rédemption (Ex 22 : 29-30). La thèse étudiera les données archéologiques du rituel de sacrifice humain avec l'attente de clarifier le sens de l'acte sacré qui se trouve dans le récit de Genèse 22.

Cette étude examinera aussi l'utilisation du rituel de don comme code symbolique et instrument littéraire pour transmettre les intérêts et les préoccupations de l'auteur. Des préoccupations qui ont été générés par des faits politiques et sociaux religieux en particuliers, provoqués par les événements reliés aux invasions Babyloniennes et Perses dans la région de la Syrie-Palestine.

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Introduction

The story of Genesis 22: 1-19 has often been referred to by scholars as the “Sacrifice of Isaac”. Although misleading it demonstrates the importance given to the role of human sacrifice within the narrative. Scholarly interpretations of the tale have typically presented the narrative as being concerned with the abolition of human sacrifice and the introduction of the “Law of Redemption” (Ex 22: 29-30), which would allow the human offering to be substituted for an animal.¹ Other scholars have chosen to understand the narrative as a form of cult aetiology which describes how the willingness of a father to obey the request of his god brings about the establishment of a sacred cultic place.²

The narrative’s close relationship to the topic of human sacrifice has led me to raise a number of questions. The narrative seems to assume that Yahweh’s demand to sacrifice Isaac was an “acceptable” request. The question is whether any evidence can be provided for the existence of cultic child or human sacrifice? Furthermore, what cultural context would allow for such a rite to be an accepted part of cultic practice? Is the historical setting of Israel’s “patriarchal” period an appropriate time period for the cultic practice to have been performed? If human sacrifice was not a part of Israel’s cultic rituals why utilize the act as the main event for the narrative? This thesis will attempt to examine what may have been the author’s intent and what role the theme of human sacrifice, however significant may have been within the narrative of Genesis 22: 1-19.

¹ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, Genesis 12-36. English (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1985), 354.

² E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible ; 1 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 155.

Method

My approach will consist of examining the literary and archaeological data found in both Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia during the Middle Bronze II, in order to investigate the principles surrounding the custom of human sacrifice. This will then allow me to isolate the evidence, which clearly presents human sacrifice as a cultic practice in order to identify the real possibility that the act may have been performed during Israel's "patriarchal" period. The question of historical time setting is an important one as many scholars have put forth the suggestion that the narrative of Genesis 22 was born out of a "patriarchal" period.³ This study will attempt to demonstrate that this approach to the narrative has generated a great deal of misleading results in respect to the historical presentation of Israel's so-called "patriarchal" age. And as a consequence, has led many scholars to faulty conclusions in respect to the redaction and intent of the narrative.

Once the archaeological data is assessed I will review the act of sacrifice as described in the Old Testament in order to better grasp the Ancient Israelite view of the cultic performance. I will then investigate the role of metaphor as a possible literary construct in order to express cultural, religious and/or political thoughts that may have been generated by a specific historical context. Hence allowing me to identify the *Sitz em Leben* of the author. Furthermore, the identification of the author's geographical and historical time setting will allow me to clarify whom the target audience was as well as the intended meaning of the narrative.

³ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, Westminster Aids to the Study of the Scriptures (Louisville, Ky: Westminster J. Knox Press, 2000), 70.

Structure

Before discussing the subject of child and human sacrifice, as depicted in the narrative of Genesis 22: 1-19, it will be important to review the archaeological data excavated from the Middle Bronze Age in the Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamian regions. The first chapter will highlight the main archaeological data in order to address the hypothesis put forth by scholars such as A.R.W. Green, that human sacrifice was indeed practiced during the patriarchal period.⁴ The review will also consist of evidence collected from other surrounding regions, which may have come into contact with the Israelite community in order to exclude the possibility of any foreign influence. The presence of child sacrifice in the Punic colonies will also be analysed as commercial relations between Phoenicia and the Syria-Palestine region have been well established by scholars.⁵

In response to the archaeological evidence I will move on to discuss in the second chapter the possibility of human sacrifice as a literary motif. This chapter will comprise a review of Anthropological theory, which will facilitate the understanding of the role played by sacrifice in expressing the relationship between the divine and the worshiper. This review will also assess the role of metaphor as a symbolic system, which can be used as a medium to convey cultic relations.

The third and final chapter will discuss the notion of authorship as well as the redactional setting of Genesis 22. The arguments for supporting a "patriarchal" time frame will be reviewed and analysed in order to eliminate this hypothesis as a possibility for the redactional time setting of the narrative. The topic of authorship and the redactional hypotheses associated to the formation of the Pentateuch will also be

⁴ Alberto R. W. Green, *Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient near East* ([S.l.]: Scholars Pr, 1975), 158-59.

⁵ María Eugenia Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West: Politics, Colonies, and Trade*, Tiro Y Las Colonias Fenicias De Occidente. English (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

examined. In addition I will offer an exegetical explanation of chapter 22: 1-19 in order to better understand the author's purpose and intent. And finally the chapter will also include a discussion on "collective recollection" and its role in the formation of group identity.⁶

At the end of this thesis I intend to make some general comments in respect to the function of human sacrifice as a literary construct. I will also briefly discuss how the biblical narratives are utilized as mediums to perpetuate and establish a tailored cultural, religious and political group identity.

⁶ Philip Davies, "The History of Ancient Israel and Judah," *Expository Times* 119, no. 1 (2007): 15-21.

CHAPTER 1

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR CHILD SACRIFICE IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

For many decades Genesis 22 has often been understood and explained in light of human sacrifice. A.R.W. Green for instance has posited that the narrative of Isaac's binding is to be interpreted as the foundation for either the institution or the place of human sacrifice within Ancient Israel.¹ Other scholars such as Claus Westermann have concluded that the narrative depicted a time when Ancient Israel's moral stance against human sacrifice had begun to emerge.² However, Ziony Zevit makes note that the ritual enacted by Abraham although drastic and perhaps polemical was also not unreasonable.³ He argues that the practice described by the narrative of Genesis 22 was a solitary, private act of piety conducted at an isolated place with no witnesses present.⁴ Despite the endless possibilities in respect to human sacrifice and its connection to Ancient Israel my aim is to answer the question of whether human sacrifice was a feature of Ancient societies contemporaneous with Israelite cultic practice and more specifically whether or not the practice of human sacrifice was one practiced during the narrative's setting of a "patriarchal" period. It is important to note that the original *Sitz im Leben* underlying the narrative of Genesis 22 needs to be uncovered in order to better understand the purpose and significance of the narrative.

In this chapter I will review and assess whether any archaeological evidence has been unearthed that may prove the existence of child or human sacrifice, which is demanded of Abraham in Genesis 22, in either the Syria-Palestine context of the

¹ Green, *Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient near East*, 158-59.

² Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, 354.

³ Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2001), 579.

⁴ Ibid.

narrative (Middle Bronze II Palestine) or in Abraham's Mesopotamian homeland, in order to argue that the narrative of Genesis 22: 1-19 cannot be understood as having its origins in the patriarchal period; but rather, the literary motifs utilized by the author reflect the historical context of a much later period.

G.C.Heider argues that the narrative seems to assume that at one time God could have demanded a human sacrifice since Abraham's reaction to the command seems to indicate that such a notion was not irreconcilable with his understanding of God.⁵ Heider moves on to explain that there are two implications, which can be ascertained from the narrative. The first is that Abraham was part of a cultural context in which human sacrifice was an accepted part of cultic practice and second it was understood that on occasion God required and accepted human victims as sacrifice.⁶ What type of cultural context would allow for such a sacrifice to be an accepted part of cultic practice? And what "kind" of deity would require and accept human victims as sacrifice?

The Cult of Molech

Molech has been understood as the name of the deity to whom children were burnt in sacrifice, first by the Canaanites and then by the Israelites, particularly in a cultic installation referred to as the "tophet" in the Valley of the son of Hinnom immediately south of Jerusalem.⁷ The personal name *Malik* is found at Ebla and at Mari, and is a name that is generally associated to funerary offerings.⁸ The Akkadian evidence from Ancient Babylonian texts also offers a netherworld connection to the

⁵ George C. Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series. 43 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 158.

⁶ Ibid., 156.

⁷ John Day, *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications; ([S.I.]: Cambridge Univ Pr, 1989), 2-3.

⁸ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 96 & 103.

personal name.⁹ Closer to the Old Testament evidence of the name *Molech* are the studies conducted at Ugarit, whereby the texts indicate that the personal name was that of a netherworld deity involved in the cult of the dead ancestors.¹⁰ Many scholars contend that the *Molech* cult spoken of in the Old Testament and practiced by the Israelites was also being practiced by the Punic colonies, a hypothesis that will be discussed later on.

Syria-Palestine Evidence

The territories encompassing the land of Ebla, Mari and Ugarit make up what is known as the region of Syria-Palestine. The question that arises, is whether or not the excavations at any one of these three sites has produced any written or physical evidence of cultic child sacrifice? According to Heider, there is very little known about Eblaite cultic performance and procedure. He states that, "the documents amply report what was offered to the gods but are totally silent about the manner and the rite of the sacrifice itself".¹¹ Furthermore Heider points out that the texts that have been identified as "tariff lists" do not suggest that a child or any human was being sacrificed at cultic events.¹² However, G. Pettinato has suggested otherwise. He speculates that the name of a month that appears in one of the calendars used by the Eblaites may be indicative of some form of human sacrifice.¹³ The feast that is to be celebrated on this specific month is called **izi-garin** which literally means "consecration" in Eblaite, which according to Pettinato could be referring to child

⁹ Ibid., 160-1.

¹⁰ Ibid., 133-4.

¹¹ Ibid., 101.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Giovanni Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla: An Empire Inscribed in Clay*, Ebla Un Impero Inciso Nell'argilla. English (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 255.

sacrifice.¹⁴ Heider notes that the basis of Pettinato's observation relies heavily on comparative evidence from Sumer, and moves on to argue that the Sumerian counterpart *izi-gar* simply means "setting fire"; without archaeological evidence to support the claim that the term was used in respect to cultic sacrifice, Pettinato's suggestions remains merely a stipulation.¹⁵ Pettinato also relies heavily on Punic material when making his observations in respect to possible evidence of cultic practices of child sacrifice; however he does not provide his readers with any linking thread that would clearly indicate that a parallel exists between the ritual practices of Sumer and those found in the Punic colonies of Northern Africa. The Eblaite evidence simply does not speak of any such cultic offerings. The lack of literary and inscriptional evidence at Mari also suggests that no form of cultic child sacrifice was being practiced by the Amorites.¹⁶

Ugaritic Evidence

Given the close relationship between Ugarit and Israel both linguistically and culturally it is important to understand the role and nature of the term **mlk** within the Ugaritic context. The existence of a possible Ugaritic *Molek* counterpart has been utilized by scholars such as O. Eissfeldt to support the hypothesis that child sacrifice was a ritual practiced by the community of ancient Ugarit.¹⁷ Eissfeldt argues that the Ugaritic use of the term *Molech* is a cognate of the Punic **mlk** and is thus not a divine name but should be understood as a technical term for a type of sacrifice.¹⁸ Eissfeldt's hypothesis rests on the fact that the inscriptions from the Punic colonies reveal that the sacrifice was regularly offered to *Baal-Hammon* or *Tanit* while the term **mlk** appears

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 101.

¹⁶ Ibid., 113.

¹⁷ Day, *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, 4.

¹⁸ Ibid., 4-5.

in a variety of syntactical constructions indicating that the term was not a divinity but rather the term for the sacrifice itself.¹⁹

Alternatively, Moshe Weinfeld on the other hand argues that the cult of *Molech* was indeed directed to a pagan deity, *Ba'al-Hadad* but that historically it never entailed actual sacrifice or burning of children, only their dedication to a deity in a fire ritual.²⁰ Weinfeld stresses that the verbs used in the description of the *Molech* cult in the Old Testament's legal and historical material do not need to be interpreted as 'sacrifice'.²¹ verbs such as נתן 'to give'²² or the hiphil of בָּרַח 'to cause to pass over, to transfer'.²³ He also argues that the typical verbs that are customarily associated with the practice of sacrifice, such as שָׂרַף 'to burn'²⁴; זָבַח 'to slaughter for sacrifice'²⁵; and שָׁחַט 'to slaughter'²⁶ are never used in the same context as the offerings dedicated to *Molech* in both the legal and historical narratives of the Old Testament, however, these terms may be found in the references of the latter prophets and writings.²⁷ Furthermore, Weinfeld observes that the terms בָּרַח in the hiphil form (to cause to pass over) and נתן (to give), which are used in the Old Testament in connection to the cult of *Molech* are also used in the Israelite practices of the first-born and do not suggest the burning or the killing of any human offering but rather are to be understood as forms of dedication or transference to a deity.²⁸ Moreover, Day makes note that despite the fact that the Old Testament presents *Molech* as a Canaanite god, the

¹⁹ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 35-6.

²⁰ Moshe Weinfeld, "Burning Babies in Ancient Israel: A Rejoinder to Morton Smith's Article in *Jaos* 95 (1975), Pp 477-479," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 10 (1979): 411.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Francis Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 678.

²³ Ibid., 137-38.

²⁴ Ibid., 976.

²⁵ Ibid., 256.

²⁶ Ibid., 1006.

²⁷ Weinfeld, "Burning Babies in Ancient Israel: A Rejoinder to Morton Smith's Article in *Jaos* 95 (1975), Pp 477-479," 411-2.

²⁸ Moshe Weinfeld, "The Worship of Molech and of the Queen of Heaven and Its Background," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 4 (1972): 141-2.

Ugaritic texts unearthed thus far make no reference to human sacrifice in connection to the deity *Molech* or the term **mlk**.²⁹

The cultic sacrifice of children is the most distinctive feature of the Biblical *Molek* cult.³⁰ This form of sacrifice has been identified with Punic forms of cultic practices referred to as **mol**k-sacrifices.³¹ Heider notes that no evidence has been found to create a link between this form of sacrifice and the actual deity referred to as **Mlk**.³² One of the scholars most interested in the literary evidence associating cultic child sacrifice with ancient Ugarit has been Andrée Herdner. She has suggested that cultic child sacrifice did indeed exist in Ugarit; and more specifically, she has proposed that the text found in *Ug7* makes reference to the sacrifice of a firstborn son in time of danger.³³ The formulation is found within a series of offerings made to *Ba'al*; **[b]kr b[']l nšqdš** which Herdner has translated as "a firstborn(?), *Ba'al* we will offer (to you)".³⁴ Herdner argues that the restoration of **[b]kr** (firstborn) should be favored over **[d]kr** (male animal) since the term **[d]kr** was not found elsewhere in Ugaritic texts except in personal names.³⁵ Heider on the other hand argues that even if the restoration of **[b]kr** is to be accepted there is no indication in the text that the

²⁹ John Day, "Ugarit and the Bible: Do They Presuppose the Same Canaanite Mythology and Religion?," (1994), 49-50.

³⁰ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 144.

The following passages from the Old Testament have been quoted by Day, *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, as being directly connected to either child sacrifice or to the cult of *Molech*; Deut 12:31; 2Kgs 16:3, 17:16-17, 21:6-7; Lev 18:21, 20:2-5; Jer 7:31, 19:5-6, 32:35; Ezek 16:20-21, 20:25-26; Mic 6:6; Ex 13:2, 12-15, 22:29, 34:19-20; Nu 3:12-13, 8:17-18, 18:15-16.

³¹ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*.

³² Ibid.

³³ Andrée Herdner, "Une Prière À Baal Des Ugaritains En Danger," *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* (1972): 693. "Il s'agit d'une prière qu'il est prescrit aux habitants d'Ugarit d'adresser au dieu Ba'al quand l'ennemi vient à menacer leur ville (p.693)." "...si l'on admet la restauration que j'ai proposée, à titre d'hypothèse, notre texte attesterait, à Ugarit, le sacrifice éventuel de premiers-nés (p.696)."

³⁴ Ibid.: 696-7. "Le mot que j'ai traduit par 'premier-né', mot qui en hébreu biblique se vocaliserait *bākôr*, est en effet ici incomplet : le **k**, bien qu'un peu abîmé, et le **r** sont seuls certains. De la première lettre, il ne reste à peu près rien. Je crois cependant discerner l'amorce d'un clou vertical, ce qui permet la restauration d'un **b**."

³⁵ Ibid.: 697. "On pourrait évidemment penser à restaurer le mot signifiant 'mâle', en hébreu *zakar*. Dans *zakar*, le **z** de l'hébreu représente l'interdentale sonore du sémitique ancien. Cette racine s'écrit normalement **dkr** à Ugarit, mais il se trouve qu'elle est attestée dans deux noms propres (**dkr**, **dkry**) et que l'ancienne interdentale s'y trouve maintenue."

firstborn had to be human.³⁶ Herdner's conclusion rests on the argument that if the text had intended the "firstborn" to be that of an animal then it would have been specified.³⁷ She also moves on to suggest that such sacrifices were most likely not carried out instead, they should be understood in light of Israelite practices as dictated in Exodus 34:20 whereby the firstborn may have been redeemed.³⁸ Herdner's hypothesis is highly debatable as her conclusions are based on supposition as opposed to archaeological evidence. Claude Schaffer in response to Herdner's article has maintained that there is no literary or archaeological evidence to support any kind of child sacrifice at Ugarit.³⁹

In 1955 Charles Virolleaud discovered a text, which reinforced the interpretation that **Mlk**-sacrifice was being practiced in ancient Ugarit.⁴⁰ However, Paolo Xella has argued that text discovered by Virolleaud was neither liturgical nor religious.⁴¹ Xella has identified the text as being an administrative document, which dealt with the consignments of wine used for royal sacrificial ceremonies.⁴² Hence by

³⁶ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 146.

³⁷ Herdner, "Une Prière À Baal Des Ugaritains En Danger," 697. "Si l'on accepte cette lecture, la question se pose de savoir si le mot 'premier-né' désigne ici une victime animale ou une victime humaine. La seconde hypothèse est plus vraisemblable. S'il s'agissait d'un animal, l'espèce serait précisée."

³⁸ Ibid. "En ce cas, il n'est d'ailleurs nullement prouvé que ce sacrifice ait été réellement pratiqué et qu'il n'y ait pas eu possibilité, pour l'auteur du vœu, de racheter la petite victime. On sait qu'en Israël le rachat du premier-né était obligatoire, comme l'atteste Exode, xxxiv, 20 : « Tout premier-né de tes fils, tu le rachèteras. »"

³⁹ Claude Schaeffer, "A Response to Une Prière À Baal Des Ugaritains En Danger," *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* (1972): 697. "Il n'est pas question de sacrifice de nouveau-nés. Et le fait que de tels sacrifices ne figurent nulle part ailleurs dans l'abondante documentation écrite livrée jusqu'ici par nos fouilles à Ugarit, en Canaan du Nord, a déjà été signalé par certains exégètes."

The text discovered at Ugarit has also been linked to the narrative of 2 Kings 3:27 by Baruch Margalit, "Why King Mesha of Moab Sacrificed His Oldest Son," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12, no. 6 (1986), who believed that the sacrifice of king Mesha's son was comparable to that found in the Ugaritic text. Scholars such as Heider however, have noted that there is no archaeological evidence from Moab to allow for such an interpretation to be valid.

⁴⁰ Charles Virolleaud, "Texte Liturgique Concernant Le Sacrifice Mlk," *Le Palais Royal d'Ugarit V 4* (1956): 555.

⁴¹ Paolo Xella, "Ktu 1,91 (Rs 19,15) E I Sacrifici Del Re," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 11 (1980): 833. "Il carattere a rigore non liturgico, ma piuttosto di registrazione economica di KTU 1.91..."

⁴² Ibid, p.833. "...è poi ulteriormente confermato dal verso della tavoletta, che elenca una serie di villaggi del regno di Ugarit che hanno fornito giare di vino per le offerte sacrificali e le occasioni cerimoniali precedentemente menzionate."

disqualifying Virolleaud's archaeological evidence Xella argues that the connection between **Milk**-sacrifice in ancient Ugarit and Punic or Phoenician sacrificial rituals is to be placed into question.⁴³ Heider also notes that insofar as Ugarit is concerned the only undisputed practice is that of an active cult of dead ancestors.⁴⁴ Based on the above arguments Heider concludes that there has been no discovery of concrete literary or inscriptional evidence of cultic child sacrifice in Syria-Palestine.

Heider observes that thus far there have been no excavations that have unearthed anything resembling the Punic "tophets" in Syria-Palestine.⁴⁵ He moves on to state that no form of child sacrifice of any sort have been found at Ebla, Mari, Ugarit or in Phoenicia.⁴⁶ This may be due to a variety of reasons such as incomplete excavations as those being conducted at Ebla, poor archaeological technique which has been demonstrated with the finds at Ugarit or to centuries of continuous occupation of sites which have been piled on top of any possible evidence⁴⁷ or as W.F. Albright and others have suggested in the case of Phoenicia that the valleys where the "tophets" were supposedly located were filled-in over the centuries.⁴⁸ There are, nevertheless, three significant excavations, Gezer, Jericho and Amman that have claimed to have found archaeological evidence of cultic child sacrifice.⁴⁹

⁴³ Ibid, p.833. "Come accennato, si tratta sostanzialmente del computo del vino consumato nei **dbh** in cui è coinvolto il re: le ipotesi sulla connessione col sacrificio-**molk** attestato nel mondo punico e forse, come proposto di recente, anche nella madre-patria fenicia, paiono ormai destituite di fondamento, almeno nella misura in cui ci si riferisce qui al re senza ambiguità di sorta."

⁴⁴ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 146.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 210.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 211.

⁴⁸ William Foxwell Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan; a Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths*, The Jordan Lectures, 1965 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 238.

⁴⁹ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 211.

Southern Syria-Palestine Evidence

The discovery found at Jericho is limited and does not provide enough archaeological evidence to make any conclusive statements in regard to child sacrifice.⁵⁰ The strongest case for the cultic practice amongst the three sites is that of Gezer, which had been analysed by a scholar named R.A. Stewart Macalister. He argued that the jars containing the infant bones, of which two showed clear signs of having been burnt, were clear demarcations of religious killing of children due to the fact that the jars were found in what appeared to be a "high place" relative to the architectural remains and the stele found near by.⁵¹ This same archaeological evidence was re-examined at later time by a scholar named W.G. Dever, who demonstrated that the jars found at the site were much earlier than the structure that was labelled a "high place." He concludes that the earliest use of the particular site was most likely nothing more than a child cemetery.⁵² A.R.W. Green adds that the jar burials found in the Palestine area are common finds on many of the archaeological sites from very early on down to the Late Bronze Age.⁵³

The construction of an airport at Amman (Jordan) during the mid-1950's uncovered a Late Bronze Age structure that was identified by the initial excavators as a temple.⁵⁴ A full excavation was later conducted by J.B. Hennessy, who revealed that the site contained enormous quantities of animal, bird and human bones as well as clear evidence of fire usage.⁵⁵ Hennessy concluded that since all the levels of occupation showed clear evidence of small isolated fires and that the top of the altar

⁵⁰ Ibid., 212.

⁵¹ Robert Alexander Stewart Macalister, *The Excavation of Gezer, 1902-1905 and 1907-1909* (London: Pub. for the Committee of the Palestine exploration fund by J. Murray, 1912).

⁵² W.G. Dever, "Gezer," in *Encyclopedia of archaeological excavations in the Holy Land* ed. Michael Avi-Yonah (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 437-8.

⁵³ Green, *Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, 330 footnote 21.

⁵⁴ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 213.

⁵⁵ John Basil Hennessy, "Excavation of a Late Bronze Age Temple at Amman," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 98 (1966): 162.

stone had also been charred that a "fire cult" of some sort had been practiced in the temple.⁵⁶ A comparative study done by Magnus Ottosson on sanctuaries throughout Palestine states that since Hennessy's finds at Amman demonstrate that the bones were significantly human and more precisely those of children it would be more than natural to suggest that the temple was being utilized for child sacrifice.⁵⁷ Subsequent revisions of the archaeological evidence have noted that while the human bones from the temple do demonstrate signs of burning, the animal bones do not. Furthermore, most of the human bones were not those of children but of adults.⁵⁸ Thus the evidence does not present a picture of cultic child sacrifice but rather the evidence suggests that what was being performed was a practice of cremation in connection with the cult of the dead in Late Bronze Age Palestine.⁵⁹

Heider notes that Northern Palestine (Israel) has produced very little evidence of cremation sites; however, three sites in the south have been unearthed which demonstrates that cremation was indeed practiced in this particular area between the 10th and 4th centuries B.C.E.⁶⁰ William Culican has analysed all three sites and has stated that on the basis of geographical distribution of the evidence found from the Iron Age, it is clear that cremation burials were typical of Iron II Phoenician culture and that in the case of the sites found in Southern Palestine Phoenician influence can clearly be demarcated from the early Iron I Philistine remains.⁶¹ Heider also points out

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Magnus Ottosson, *Temples and Cult Places in Palestine* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1980), 104.

⁵⁸ Larry G. Herr, *The Amman Airport Excavations, 1976*, Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research; (Philadelphia, Penn: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1983), 110.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 218.

⁶¹ William Culican, "Graves at Tell Er-Reqeish," *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* 1, no. 6 (1973): 103.

that the archaeological evidence found in Syria-Palestine in respect to cremation cannot demonstrate that cremation is to be indisputably associated to Phoenicia.⁶²

Transjordan Evidence

Three sites have also been found in the Transjordan area that may provide possible evidence for cremation rather than cultic child sacrifice. In Dibon (9th-6th century B.C.E.) eight Iron Age tombs have been uncovered where the archaeological evidence suggests that the tombs were looted and the remains were burned.⁶³ Heider notes that there are no clear signs of sacrificial activity and that the site is to be understood as a cremation pit or as a separate burned bone deposit.⁶⁴ At Nebo and Sahab (12th century B.C.E.) it has been noted by the excavators that cremation may have been involved due to the discovery of human and animal remains. The indication that cremation may have been practiced at Nebo was in a level specified as Iron Age, where a black "streak" of some sort was found and was suggested by the excavators as being indicative of cremation.⁶⁵ However the excavators at Sahab were able to disclose a greater amount of details in respect to the remains and have noted that bones with signs of burning have been found in both jars and wooden coffins. Although the evidence thus far suggests that the site may have been utilized for cremation, the site is still under study and that it is too early for speculations.⁶⁶ Scholars have suggested that the practice of cremation was a development within the cult of the dead and was perhaps performed with the intention of purifying the dead,

⁶² Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 219.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 220. The primary excavator at the Nebo site was J. Ripamonti, however the finds were published by A.D. Tushingham, "The Excavations at Dibon (Dhiban) in Moab" in the Annual report of the ASOR Journal of 1972, while the excavation at Sahab was unearthed by M.M. Ibrahim who published the finds "Archaeological Excavations at Sahab 1972" in the ADAJ of that same year.

⁶⁶ Moawiyah M. Ibrahim, "Archaeological Excavation of Sahab, 1972," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 17 (1972): 32.

but once again, nothing conclusive has been found to support this claim. What is certain is that cremation was widely practiced in the area of Syria-Palestine during the Iron Age.⁶⁷ The sites that have been identified as cremation burials give no indications that the deaths of the victims were either violent or sacrificial in nature. Furthermore, Green states that evidence from Syria-Palestine contributes very little to the understanding of ritual killings of humans or more specifically children and that the evidence uncovered thus far is so ambiguous that it would be very unwise to attempt to come to any definite conclusions with respect to the sacrificial cult.⁶⁸ We now turn eastward towards Mesopotamia the motherland of Abraham.

Mesopotamian Evidence

Friedrich Blome in more recent studies of Assyriology has maintained the view that human sacrifice in general was a rare occurrence in ancient Mesopotamia.⁶⁹ However scholars such as Wolfgang Rollig have argued that the existence of such practices is present in Neo-Assyrian literature. The argument rests on several literary formulations found in Neo-Assyrian contract curses, which state that the defaulting party will have to burn their children to **Adad**, **Adadmilki** and **Belet-seri** in the **hamru** outside of the city.⁷⁰ In K.H. Deller's review of R. de Vaux's Les Sacrifices de l'Ancien Testament, Deller argues to the contrary that such formulations were metaphorical; instead he argues that the formulations referred to the dedication of a certain number of the offender's children to the full-time service of the deity.⁷¹ Heider notes that by stating that the clauses were metaphorical, Deller has rejected two other

⁶⁷ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 221.

⁶⁸ Green, *Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, 149.

⁶⁹ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 164.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 165.

⁷¹ Ibid. The original assessment can be found in Karl Heinz Deller, "Review of Les Sacrifices De L'ancien Testament by R. De Vaux," *Orientalia* 34, no. Rome (1965): 382-86.

possible interpretations: that the curse clause of the contracts actually mean what they say or that the clauses were intended as legal “overkill” designed to ensure compliance with the terms of the contract but not really executed in the event of default (which in the end is what perhaps Deller is arguing).⁷² In either case, without archaeological evidence it is difficult to support either interpretation, actual practice or formulaic threat as being correct.⁷³

Heider makes note that nothing remotely resembling the Punic “tophet” has been unearthed in Mesopotamia.⁷⁴ There is much debate and controversy over whether any human sacrifice was known to the inhabitants of Mesopotamia; most of the debate surrounding the issue of Mesopotamian human sacrifice is that the archaeological evidence does not provide a clear picture of the practice and so has left much room for interpretation. Green has conducted an analysis of the archaeological remains found at Nuzi and Tepe Gawra he states that the evidence unearthed at these sites demonstrate that children were ritually killed and placed in the foundations and floors of buildings while they were being constructed.⁷⁵ However, Richard Ellis who also conducted an analysis of the same sites, proposes a different interpretation than that offered by Green. Ellis argues that neither the archaeological nor the inscriptional evidence provide any conclusive results which would allow scholars to believe that human sacrifice was practiced in Mesopotamia in the form of a “foundation sacrifice”.⁷⁶ Heider notes that as opposed to the Punic form of child sacrifice, which was clearly practiced at a communal cultic center, “foundation sacrifices” are presented as being

⁷² Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 165.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 204.

⁷⁵ Green, *Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, 59-60.

⁷⁶ Richard S. Ellis, *Foundation Deposits in Ancient Mesopotamia*, Yale Near Eastern Researches. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 41.

practiced in the home of the worshiper.⁷⁷ Heider points out that Green does admit that at both sites, Nuzi and Tepe Gawra it was common practice to bury the deceased in the floor of one's private dwelling.⁷⁸ Hence, Heider moves on to argue that since burying the deceased in one's home was a well known practice at these two sites in Mesopotamia, than the remains of children found in the floors of buildings does not necessarily suggest ritual child sacrifice.⁷⁹ Green also argues that certain jar burials of infants found either under a corner section or in the walls of houses are suggestive of ritual killings performed for the benefit of the inhabitants living there.⁸⁰ Heider maintains that Green basis his claims on burials of infants whose remains were placed in the walls in a very specific manner or whose remains seemed to have received some sort of special treatment beyond those normally accorded to the deceased.⁸¹ This can be seen in strata 3 and 2, identified as 16th-15th century B.C.E. of the Nuzi site where Green states that several infant burials were found in an upright position rather than the normal inverted position, and the burial jars were found at the floor level or at the base of the wall and were then built over rather than simply buried beneath the floor.⁸² Heider argues that Green appears to press the evidence which suggests that the burials may have some "religious significance" and thus by association concludes that the burials must have been of sacrificial nature.⁸³ Green however is aware of the limitations of his arguments and admits, "The mere fact that the interments were contemporaneous with the construction of the walls or pavements does not constitute adequate proof of ritual killing."⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 205.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Green, *Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient near East*, 60-1.

⁸¹ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 205.

⁸² Green, *Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient near East*, 61.

⁸³ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 206.

⁸⁴ Green, *Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient near East*, 62.

Heider further notes that infant burials of this type were also found at Tepe Gawra in what have been identified as sacred structures, whereby the infant burials were concentrated in one location and carefully orientated towards the altar.⁸⁵ The excavators of strata 9 to 20 have suggested that the finds at Tepe Gawra indicate that those temples where infant burials have been unearthed were the cultic places of worship of chthonic deities who as heads of the cult of the underworld and the dead demanded human sacrifice of their worshippers.⁸⁶ Heider notes that although it is possible that the Tepe Gawra evidence is perhaps indicative of ritual killing, that this should not encourage the re-grouping of all sub-pavement and intramural burials to be classified as ritual forms of child sacrifice.⁸⁷ Ellis also points out that it would be incredibly difficult to distinguish what constituted a "normal" intramural burial and what constituted a sacrificial burial if the only indicative characteristics are to be uncovered from the manner in which a structure was constructed.⁸⁸ Furthermore he contends that simply because a built-in burial is found in an important location such as the foundation or even the corner of a structure, this does not necessarily imply that the deceased was ritually killed. It may instead be that the deceased simply died during construction and was buried on site.⁸⁹ Ellis concludes that since the instances are relatively few whereby one may find indicative features of foundational sacrifice and since even these instances do not really differ in the manner in which they were arranged from other forms of foundational burials than there is very little reason to

⁸⁵ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 206.

⁸⁶ Arthur J. Tobler, *Excavations at Tepe Gawra, V 2: Levels IX-XX* (Philadelphia: Univ of Pennsylvania Pr, 1950), 124.

⁸⁷ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 206.

⁸⁸ Ellis, *Foundation Deposits in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 35.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

speculate that such a sacrificial practice existed among the inhabitants of Mesopotamia.⁹⁰

Green has also investigated what he calls “chapel” sacrifices, which are first attested in the Habur region of Syria in the Sargonic period and later at Ur in the Larsa period.⁹¹ According to Green, “chapel” sacrifices are infant burials which are normally found in a room of a private home which is clearly utilized for religious purposes; the religious indicator is normally that of a altar located at one end of the room as well as other cultic objects such as clay platters for food offerings located near the altar.⁹² Green specifies that the burial jars were placed into the floor facing the altar.⁹³ In both circumstances, Habur and Ur excavators found only one infant buried before each family altar.⁹⁴ Heider notes that the excavations demonstrate no signs of violence to the bones, nor was there any written evidence found at the site to indicate that the burial was a sacrificial one.⁹⁵ The argument made by Green that the “chapel” burials were infant sacrifices is circumstantial; the manner in which the infants were buried does demonstrate a clear sign of some sort of special treatment. Instead the practice appears to be a much more private one rather than an official cultic practice.⁹⁶ The “chapel” sacrifices described by Green seemed to be a common feature amongst the inhabitants living in the periphery of the Mesopotamian heartland.⁹⁷ Heider concludes that the archaeological evidence for cultic child sacrifice in Mesopotamia, if any, points to Syria as the area where the rite may have been practiced and most likely originated.⁹⁸ There is very little archaeological

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Green, *Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient near East*, 57-8.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 57.

⁹⁴ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 208.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 209.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 206.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 209.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

evidence thus far which can concretely point to a Mesopotamian practice of cultic child sacrifice.

Punic Evidence

The narratives found in the Old Testament in respect to the *Molek* cult emphasize that the cult performed actual child sacrifice and hence, this has lead scholars to propose a plausible historical reconstruction and explanation of the context of the Biblical practice. The richest source of relevant archaeological evidence is the Punic colonies of the western Mediterranean.⁹⁹ However, scholars such as Green have argued that a northern Anatolia and northern Syrian origin for the cultic ritual of child sacrifice is more likely.¹⁰⁰

The Punic evidence comes to us from a series of excavations unearthing sacred precincts also known as “tophets” (here using the Old Testament term) amongst the ruins of the western Mediterranean colonies.¹⁰¹ These include: Carthage and Sousse, in modern Tunisia, Motya in Sicily and Tharros, Sulcis, Monte Sirai, Bythia and Nova in Sardinia.¹⁰²

The first item to be discussed is the stele from Carthage, which was first published in 1923. The stele depicts a priest bearing a child in the same manner in which an animal is normally borne when performing the ritual act of sacrifice.¹⁰³ The second item under consideration comes from Spain, though Heider notes that no “tophet” has yet to be uncovered in this particular region.¹⁰⁴ In 1971 Spanish archaeologist Martin Almagro-Gorbea discovered the remains of a stone tower from

⁹⁹ Ibid., 195.

¹⁰⁰ Green, *Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, 57-8 & 77-9.

¹⁰¹ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 196.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 189.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

ca. 500 B.C.E. at Pozo Moro, Spain (125 km southwest of the Mediterranean coast).¹⁰⁵

Almagro-Gorbea has suggested that the red clay found on the inside of the tower and a circle of ash along with the calcinated bone fragments and burnt furnishings demonstrate that the tower was used as a cremation furnace.¹⁰⁶ Even more important is the tower's association to cultic child sacrifice. On one of the tower's stone relief panels located on the upper portion of the tower is a depiction of a banquet.¹⁰⁷

Scholars such as Charles A. Kennedy have described the depiction as:

"A banquet prepared for a two-headed monster with the body of a human. He sits to the left of the scene on a throne with a fringed cushion or covering for the seat...in its upraised right hand is a bowl. Over the rim of the bowl can be seen the head and feet of a small person with its head turned to look at the upper head of the monster...Behind the table stands a male figure wearing a long fringed tunic or robe. He raises a small bowl in a gesture of offering."¹⁰⁸

Kennedy argues that a comparison can be drawn between the stele in Pozo Moro and those found in both Egypt and Ugarit whereby the two-headed monster represents Death and the "small persons" are children being offered to Death in a sacrificial meal.¹⁰⁹ Heider points out that while the Spanish tower is of great importance to the study of child sacrifice, the tower located at Pozo Moro was not constructed by Punic artisans; however, there is no doubt that the artist in question was influenced by Near Eastern models both architecturally and iconographically.¹¹⁰ That the tower is to be understood as functioning as a cremation furnace for child victims as depicted by the

¹⁰⁵ Martin Almagro-Gorbea, "Les Reliefs Orientalisants De Pozo Moro (Albacete, Espagne)," in *Mythe Et Personnification* (Paris : Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres", 1980), 123-25.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 125. "...les travaux d'excavations révélèrent une couche de très petits fragments de blocs provenant du monument, et au-dessous un bloc d'argile rouge brûlée dont la hauteur approximative correspondait à la base du monument. La base reposait sur cette argile qui doit correspondre au sol préparé pour « *ponere bustum* » et où avait lieu la crémation rituelle du cadavre. Au-dessous de cette couche d'argile rouge on découvrit un cercle de terre noire formée de cendres et d'osselets provenant sûrement d'une crémation...."

¹⁰⁷ Charles A. Kennedy, "The Mythological Reliefs from Pozo Moro, Spain," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, no. 20 (1981): 212.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.: 213-14.

¹¹⁰ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 191.

iconography cannot be confirmed by the archaeological evidence.¹¹¹ Heider also observes that the children depicted in the Pozo Moro tower were not being burned and hence the association made to Punic cultic child sacrifice is highly unlikely.¹¹²

Carthaginian Evidence

Sabatino Moscati who has done a comparative study of the Punic evidence provides his readers with an explanation of what can be found at the various Punic sacred precincts: "unroofed sacred areas which were enclosed by means of walls and in which were placed urns containing the calcinated remains of children and small animals."¹¹³ Heider notes that at Carthage in the lowest strata (8th-7th century B.C.E.) the jars were found near a mound of stones which appeared to have been erected as a sort of memorial or marker, while in later periods (7th-6th century B.C.E. and on) the burials were commemorated with steles.¹¹⁴ Early excavators, such as H. Benichou-Safar, suggested that infants which had been buried in "tophets" were those which had died naturally,¹¹⁵ however, Heider points out that the presence of both animal bones combined with the high concentration of strictly children's remains suggests that it was unlikely that the "tophets" should be understood as mere cemeteries.¹¹⁶ It is also important to note that none of the Punic sites except Monte Sirai are either connected to or part of a temple.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 192.

¹¹³ Sabatino Moscati, *The World of the Phoenicians*, History of Civilisation. -- (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), 49.

¹¹⁴ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 197.

¹¹⁵ Hélène Benichou-Safar, "À Propos Des Ossements Humains Du Tophet Du Carthage," *Rivista di Studi Fenici* 9 (1981): 9. "Il n'est donc pas déraisonnable de croire qu'à côté de quelques dizaines—peut-être davantage—d'enfants effectivement offerts vivants au tophet, celui-ci abrite pour l'essentiel des petits êtres nés avant terme, morts-nés ou fauchés prématurément."

¹¹⁶ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 197.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 198.

Furthermore, scholars such as R. de Vaux and P.G. Mosca have argued that the decreasing ratio of human to animal remains at Carthage demonstrated that the sacrificial practice in the Punic colony was attenuated over time and that the cult opted for animal substitution instead.¹¹⁸ However, the field director of the most recent archaeological excavation at Carthage, Lawrence E. Stager, has argued that the evidence from Carthage suggests quite the opposite.¹¹⁹ Stager's argument is founded on the project's osteology report, which indicates that out of eighty urns analyzed from the 7th-6th century B.C.E. fifty of them contained human bones only, twenty-four contained solely animal bones and six had a mixture of both human and animal remains.¹²⁰ On the other hand the second group of fifty urns from the 4th century B.C.E. painted a different picture; out of the fifty urns analyzed forty-four were solely human bones, five were animal bones only and only one urn contained a mixture of both animal and human remains.¹²¹ This leads Stager to conclude that while animal substitution was both allowed and at times practiced by the members of the cult at an early time in the history of Carthage, past scholars have misinterpreted the history of the Punic practice. Stager argues:

From this analysis [...] I have difficulty accepting the evolutionary scheme proposed by many historians of religion who maintain that the "barbaric" practice of human sacrifice was gradually replaced by the more "civilized" practice of animal substitution. Such was not the case in Carthage: for it is precisely in the 4th-3rd centuries B.C.E., when Carthage had attained the heights of urbanity that child sacrifice flourished as never before.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 199. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), 445-46. Paul G. Mosca, "Child Sacrifice in Canaanite and Israelite Religion: A Study in Mulk and Mlk" (Harvard University, 1975), 237-38.

¹¹⁹ Lawrence E. Stager, "Carthage: A View from the Tophet," in *Phönizier Im Westen : Die Beiträge Des Internationalen Symposiums Über "Die Phönizische Expansion Im Westlichen Mittelmeerraum"* ed. Hans Georg Niemeyer (Mainz am Rhein Zabern, 1982), 159.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 160.

¹²² Ibid., 163.

Hence, de Vaux and Mosca's suggestion that the cultic practice of child sacrifice was attenuated and eventually replaced with animal sacrifice is an interpretation, which does not concord with Stager's recent archaeological finds at Carthage.

Stager estimates that between the 5th and 3rd centuries B.C.E. 20 000 urns were deposited in the "tophet" at Carthage; this would allow for an average of about 100 urns per year and slightly less than one every three days.¹²³ He moves on to argue that this archaeological evidence is enough to suggest that the urn deposits were neither casual nor sporadic.¹²⁴ Mosca on the other hand suggests that the burial jars found at Carthage demonstrate that the random mixing of calcinated human and animal bones as well as the presence of bones from several children in a single urn suggested that the burning area utilized for the sacrifice were either only periodically cleared of old remains or that the cultic area was to be understood as the cultic site for mass sacrifices perhaps only utilized in times of crisis.¹²⁵ Stager argues against this hypothesis and explains that the typical pattern discovered at Carthage is the careful placement of usually one or sometimes two urns in a single pit and it was rare to find a pit with a deposit of three or more urns; hence the hypothesis of earlier scholars that the "tophet" was a mass burial site can no longer be maintained.¹²⁶ The skeletal evidence that has been preserved indicates that a conscious effort was made by parents and/or priests to collect from the altar the particular remains of one or two individuals and to deposit them in urns; this detail argues against the hypothesis of mass sacrifice.¹²⁷ Hence, the archaeological evidence suggests that child sacrifice in times

¹²³ Ibid., 158.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Mosca, "Child Sacrifice in Canaanite and Israelite Religion: A Study in Mulk and Mlk ", 54.

¹²⁶ Stager, "Carthage: A View from the Tophet," 158.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 159.

of communal crisis was the exception rather than the rule and that the evidence does not present us with a picture of mass burials.¹²⁸

The archaeological report presented by Stager also demonstrated that the urns containing multiple bones belonging to several children were at times made up of at least one either premature or newborn child while the other remains were of children, which appeared to be of a more mature age group.¹²⁹ Based on these finds, Stager proposes that the urns, which contained the premature or newborn children were cases whereby parents had vowed an unborn child except that the child died either before or at birth obligating the parents to offer their next youngest child to ensure the success of the vow.¹³⁰ While other scholars have argued that the relatively high percentage of premature and newborn babies as well as foetuses at both Carthage and Tharros, indicates that, in many cases, the sacrifice was performed on sickly or stillborn babies, which would be logical up to a point in a period when infant mortality must have been fairly high.¹³¹

Stager posits an important question, why would such an institution, with potentially dire consequences for a young colony, have been established at such an early stage of the development of the Punic colony?¹³² He argues that unless there was a continual flow of new comers from the motherland, which was not the case the institution of child sacrifice along with high mortality rates (which seemed to have affected both infants and adults) would have proved to be suicidal for many of the Punic colonies.¹³³ Stager argues that self-extinction was not the purpose or the consequence of child sacrifice at Carthage, where the practice persisted for more than

¹²⁸ Lawrence E. Stager and Samuel R. Wolff, "Child Sacrifice at Carthage - Religious Rite or Population Control: Archaeological Evidence Provides Basis for a New Analysis," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 10, no. 1 (1984): 44.

¹²⁹ Stager, "Carthage: A View from the Tophet," 161.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 161-2.

¹³¹ Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West: Politics, Colonies, and Trade*, 214-5.

¹³² Stager, "Carthage: A View from the Tophet," 161.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

five centuries. He moves on to conclude that the primary reason why the rite did not result in such a fatal predicament was due to the flexible nature of the ritual provided by the option of animal substitution.¹³⁴ Animal substitution provided the optional means by which an otherwise rigid sacrificial system could adapt to the changing demographic situations of the colony.¹³⁵ In the early development of the Punic colony, animal substitution was widely practiced as an acceptable response to the vital ritual of "tophet" sacrifices. Later on in the 4th-3rd centuries B.C.E., when a New Carthage was being developed along the Mediterranean Coast and the metropolitan area was estimated to be over a quarter of a million inhabitants, animal substitution was not a common practice in respect to the "tophet" rituals.¹³⁶ Children, not animals, were by far the most common sacrificial victims.¹³⁷ It is important to note as Stager mentioned earlier that it was precisely when Carthage had attained the heights of urbanity that "child sacrifice flourished as never before".¹³⁸

Phoenician Origins?

Based on the physical evidence unearthed at the archaeological sites, scholars are generally confident that the Punic practice of cultic child sacrifice seems securely established.¹³⁹ As was mentioned earlier the prevalent view in biblical scholarship is that the *Molech* cult was associated with child sacrifices and many scholars also speculate that the practice was introduced under the influence of the Phoenicians.¹⁴⁰ No evidence of cultic child sacrifice has been found in Phoenicia itself: de Vaux argues that both the name given to child sacrifice (**mol**k-sacrifice) and the observance

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 162.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 198.

¹⁴⁰ Weinfeld, "The Worship of Molech and of the Queen of Heaven and Its Background," 133.

of the rite within the motherland cannot be ascertained through the indigenous texts left behind by the Phoenicians.¹⁴¹ Weinfeld moves on to state that not only have scholars not found any reference to the name of the sacrifices or to the manner in which the rites were performed within the Phoenician context but that evidence for the existence of the institution itself has not been unearthed.¹⁴² Reconstruction of the Punic cult's history and evolution as a practice has been highly debated among scholars. Albright has suggested that due to the relatively late practice of setting up commemorative steles in connection with the rite of Punic cultic child sacrifice it is improbable that the practice was derived from the Phoenician homeland.¹⁴³ If it is the case, as Albright suggests, that the Punic cult of child sacrifice did not find its origins within Phoenicia then one is left to wonder when and where did the term **molk** come to be associated with the Punic cult?

Although Heider states that the divine name **M-l-k** does not occur within Phoenician inscriptions the name of the principle deity of the region, *Melqart*, is normally understood as a combination, which incorporates both **milk** and **qart** meaning "king of the city".¹⁴⁴ Until recently the only evidence for cultic child sacrifice in mainland Phoenicia came from classical sources. Philo of Byblos, who was a Phoenician himself, is perhaps the most relevant of these classical witnesses, making reference to what he claims to be an ancient source, *Sanchuniathon*, in order to give weight to his rendition of history.¹⁴⁵ However, Heider notes that Philo's testimony is both historical and mythical in nature and that the veracity of all classical reports in respect to Phoenician cultic child sacrifice has been overshadowed with doubt given the lack of archaeological confirmation as well as the 'lateness' and

¹⁴¹ Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 86-7.

¹⁴² Weinfeld, "The Worship of Molech and of the Queen of Heaven and Its Background," 140.

¹⁴³ Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan; a Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths*, 238.

¹⁴⁴ Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, 174.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

possible bias of the classical authors.¹⁴⁶ The strongest arguments that such sacrifices were indeed practiced in Phoenicia rely heavily on Punic epigraphic and archaeological evidence. The reasoning follows that since the Punic colonies were established in a short span of time it would be highly unlikely that such an abundant manifestation of cultic child sacrifice developed independently from the Phoenician homeland.¹⁴⁷ Most recently scholars have discovered an inscription dated to the 3rd-2nd century B.C.E. in Nebi-Yunis, a city north of Ashod on the Mediterranean coast, which indicates that **mlk** was a sacrificial term in Phoenicia.¹⁴⁸ Heider makes an important point in response to this recently discovered **mlk** inscription; he notes that scholars are not arguing that this inscription is indicative of ritual child sacrifice being performed in 3rd-2nd century Phoenicia; rather, they are arguing that **mlk** is in this particular instance to be understood as a sacrificial term and that **mlk**-sacrifice were being presented as a form of sacrifice that was attenuated by substitution.¹⁴⁹ Heider also notes that as in the Punic colonies, Phoenician **mlk**-sacrifice is a practice that is normally directed solely to *Baal-Hammon (El)* and *Tanit*, hence the term **mlk** always follows with another qualifying term.¹⁵⁰ At most, the inscriptional evidence allows scholars to conclude that **mlk** could be used as some sort of sacrificial term in the Phoenician homeland around the 3rd-2nd century B.C.E. Heider points out that how, when and where the specialization of the term took place as well as the possible borrowing of the term for sacrificial usage is impossible to determine with the evidence accumulated thus far by scholars, not to mention what the term denotes for

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 182.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. It is important to note that this particular argument, which was discussed in the first part of this chapter, was originally presented by O. Eissfeldt in his book *Molk als Opferbegriff im Punischen und Hebräischen und das Ende des Gottes Moloch* in 1935.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 183.

every exact usage at each time and place.¹⁵¹ For now, scholars can say that **mlk** as a sacrificial term is limited to one possible late 1st millennium Phoenician attestation forcing scholars to face a two-century gap, which is a very large break in the continuity of the practice, one which cannot be ignored.¹⁵² More recently scholars have argued that although the antecedents of the **molk** sacrifice are encountered in the east, its definitive form and consolidation as a collective practice are of Carthaginian invention.¹⁵³

Cult of Yahweh

As no evidence can be found which attests to the actual practice of cultic child sacrifice in the Syria-Palestine region or in Mesopotamia where does this notion of child sacrifice come from? It is clear from the archaeological evidence that we are dealing with a narrative, which does not directly or fully represent its original environment. Morton Smith argues that the primary *Sitz im Leben* of the narratives found in the Old Testament is of those who wrote, copied and corrected the texts and testify primarily about their lives and secondarily and unreliably about the events they purport to narrate.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, these narratives demonstrate a primary concern with the cult of the god Yahweh.¹⁵⁵ Smith points out that the scholarly consensus was to suppose that the pre-conquest period had developed a Yahweh cult and therefore all other worship was seen as a deviation from this accepted norm.¹⁵⁶ However, Smith argues that Yahwistic syncretism was dominant in the cult of Yahweh at Jerusalem “to

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 184.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West: Politics, Colonies, and Trade*, 217.

¹⁵⁴ Morton Smith and Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, Religions in the Greco-Roman World; V. 130/1-2 (New York :: E.J. Brill, 1996), 10.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 19.

the very last day of the 1st Temple."¹⁵⁷ Smith uses the term syncretism to identify those aspects of foreign policy, which were imposed by the royal court arguing that those who conceived of Yahweh as exclusive were not the official representatives of the country's legally established religion.¹⁵⁸

Following Smith, J.H. Tigay argues that it would have seemed perfectly natural to polytheistic Yahwists that Yahweh authorized the worship of other deities, conceived as his subordinates.¹⁵⁹ Prophetic "complaints" are a prime example that many Israelites worshiped other gods alongside Yahweh.¹⁶⁰ The prophetic critique of child sacrifice demonstrates that many Israelites claimed that Yahweh did require the sacrifice of their children (Ezek 20: 25-26) while that same claim is rejected by other prophets such as Jeremiah who clearly believed that Yahweh never made such claims (Jer 7: 31; 19: 5; 32: 35).¹⁶¹ Smith argues that the population was not divided between Yahweh worshipers and their opponents.¹⁶² Rather polytheistic Yahwism was the norm practiced and preached by the official representatives of the national cult and the Yahwist reformation which demanded the sole worship of Yahweh was a minority within the community up and until after the 7th century B.C.E.¹⁶³ It is important to note that it is in the late 7th and early 6th century B.C.E that the ritual act of child sacrifice was strongly opposed and was closely associated to idolatry.¹⁶⁴ From the various accounts of human sacrifice it is evident that the concept was not a foreign one. If we were to follow along the path of Smith's argument then it would be conceivable that Yahweh worshipers would also take part in the worship of foreign cults and their

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 26.

¹⁵⁹ Jeffrey H. Tigay, "The Significance of the End of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)," (1996), 138.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Smith and Cohen, *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, 26.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 39.

¹⁶⁴ Jon Douglas Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 4.

deities alongside that of Yahweh and therefore possibly maintain admonitions opposing child sacrifice. What is important to note here is that there is no archaeological evidence suggesting that such sacrifice took place.

What can be established from the archaeological evidence is that the inhabitants of the Punic colony of Carthage during the 4th -3rd century B.C.E., where it has been recently argued that the practice originated, were most definitely practicing the ritual act of child sacrifice. A time and place removed from the so-called “patriarchal” period reflected in Genesis 22.

If the narrative of Genesis 22 is not to be understood in a literal manner as we have come to conclude through the analysis of the archaeological evidence, then what is the intent of the narrative? In the following chapter we shall discuss the possibility of the ritual act of sacrifice as a symbolic code and attempt to comprehend the role sacrifice plays in the Ancient Israelite community.

CHAPTER 2

SACRIFICE AS SYMBOLIC ACT

So far I have argued that the archaeological data has demonstrated that the patriarchal period does not seem to have fostered any notion of human sacrifice that would have been acceptable under normal circumstances. Despite the fact that some scholars, such as E.A. Speiser, have suggested that some of the foundational elements of the narrative of Genesis 22 can be dated to an early period in Israel's history.¹ If child sacrifice or human sacrifice in general was not being practiced in the patriarchal period in and around the Syria-Palestine region then why write a narrative whereby the climactic action is one which according to archaeological remains could not have possibly taken place in the time or place depicted by the narrative?

In order to better understand the ritual act of sacrifice within Ancient Israel a more balanced approach needs to be examined. In this chapter we will be taking a closer look at the actual rite of sacrifice as practiced by the Ancient Israelites in an attempt to analyze the sacrificial process as a whole. We will do so by examining the components found within the priestly materials which will enable us to better grasp the performance of ritual acts as well as their purpose and intent. We will also evaluate the possibility of whether or not the sacrificial rite as described in Genesis 22 should be understood as a symbolic act or as a literal one. The symbolic meaning often associated to sacrificial rituals will be discussed by reviewing the theories of sacrifice posited by several anthropologists.

¹ Speiser, *Genesis*, xxvii.

Sacrifice in the Pentateuch

R. de Vaux in his book *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* argues that sacrifice was the principle act of Israel's cult and that the altar was the locale where sacrifice was to take place.² According to de Vaux sacrifice can be defined as any offering animal or vegetable, which is wholly or partially destroyed upon an altar as a token of homage to God.³ Within the confines of Israelite cultic sacrifice several terms are used to denote "sacrifice" and they are not always clearly distinguishable for instance one and the same word can denote several kinds of sacrifice and one kind of sacrifice can be associated to a variety of terms. According to De Vaux the vocabulary reflects an historical development and the fusion of various practices similar to one another but originating from different backgrounds.⁴ The code of sacrifice practiced during the Second Temple period can be found within the book of Leviticus and more precisely within the first seven chapters.

The term most often used in narratives of Israelite sacrifice is *עֹלָה*. The term, which is most often rendered as the English word 'holocaust', *עֹלָה* comes from the root meaning 'to go up, to ascend', hence the term can be understood as either the sacrifice, which is 'taken up' to the altar or more likely whose smoke 'ascends' to God when it is burnt upon the altar.⁵ The characteristic feature of this particular sacrifice is that the entire victim is burnt and nothing is given back to the individual making the offering or to the priest performing the rite (except the skin).⁶ This is why in the Septuagint the term *עֹלָה* is translated by the Greek translator as 'holocaust,' which means 'wholly burnt'.⁷ The ritual is described in the first chapter of Leviticus as

² Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), 415.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 750.

⁶ Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 415.

⁷ Ibid.

necessitating a male animal victim without any blemishes of either small or large proportion.⁸ The individual offering the animal must present the victim and must be in a state of purity.⁹ He then moves on to lay his hands upon the head of the victim not as a symbol of substitution or of transference but as a form of attestation that this victim comes from this individual and that the sacrifice is offered in his name.¹⁰ Once the individual making the sacrifice cuts the throat of the animal, the animal would be brought up to the altar and given to the priest who would then pour the blood around the altar.¹¹ Afterwards the victim was skinned and cut up into four and placed into the four corners of the altar by the priest, which was then to be burnt by the fire that was always kept alive (Lv 6: 5-6).¹² Later on in the ritual of עֹלֶה it is noted that along with the burnt offering there must also be a מִנְחָה offering, normally understood as an offering of grain,¹³ and a libation of wine.¹⁴

Starting with the first chapter of Leviticus one can quickly observe the problem of fluidity in respect to the terms utilized to designate the various forms of sacrifice.¹⁵ For instance the עֹלֶה sacrifice understood as the 'whole burnt-offering' is also referred to as the קָרְבַּן sacrifice in Lv 1:2, 10, 14, which is understood as that which an

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 416.

¹⁰ Ibid. According to de Vaux many scholars have understood the rite as a ritual whose sole purpose was to expiate the sins of the individual offering the sacrifice. In Leviticus 16:22 the reader is introduced to the what is referred to as the ritual of the 'scapegoat' whereby the sins of the people are transferred to the goat by the gesture of the laying of the hands upon the animal victim by the those offering him. De Vaux argues that it is precisely this conception of transference which renders the sacrificial act void because it is precisely because the goat is loaded with the sins of the people that it becomes defiled and unacceptable to God

¹¹ Ibid. De Vaux explains that the blood was believed to contain the life force of every living creature for in the mind of the Israelite "the life of all flesh is its blood" (Lv 17:14) and belonged to God alone.

¹² Ibid. De Vaux makes note that everything including the head, intestines and the hooves or feet were first washed and then placed unto the altar to be burnt.

¹³ Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 585.

¹⁴ Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 416. A ritual normally performed and a ruling applied in particular to the feast of the Weeks (Lv 23: 18) and to the daily burnt-offering according to Ex 29: 38-42. De Vaux also notes that the grain offering was burnt and the wine was poured out unto the altar much like the blood of the victim.

¹⁵ Ibid., 417.

individual 'brings near' to God or to the altar.¹⁶ It is also the term utilized by the writers of Leviticus, Numbers and Ezekiel to describe all sorts of sacrifices not simply those associated to the *לֶחֶם עֹלָה* sacrifice.¹⁷ In the same chapter of Leviticus the term used to refer to the 'burnt-offering' is no longer *לֶחֶם עֹלָה* but *אֵשָׁה* (Lv 1: 9, 13, 17).¹⁸ The etymology of the word according to De Vaux is highly debated however according to the BDB the term means 'an offering made by fire' and is customarily used in respect to animal offerings as well as the *מִנְחָה* offerings (grain-offering).¹⁹ David Clines adds that the "fire-offering" is to be understood as a medium that transforms the sacrifice into a sacred act.²⁰ There are also other types of offering which are normally associated to Priestly rituals; they are customarily referred to as the *זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים* and are rendered as either a 'peace-offering' or as an offering of 'thanksgiving'.²¹ De Vaux notes that half of the sacrificial code of the second Temple is concerned with expiatory sacrifices the purpose of the sacrifice is to re-establish the covenant with God when it has been broken by the sins of man.²²

Within this particular category of sacrifice two further subcategories can be identified, they are respectively, the sacrifice for sin *זֶבַח חַטָּאת*, which Clines identifies as being either an offering that purifies one from the guilt of sin or that imposes a form of punishment for one's sins,²³ and the sacrifice of reparation *זֶבַח עֹלָה* this offering in particular seems to have been restricted to offences committed against God or a fellow

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 808.

¹⁸ Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 417.

¹⁹ Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 77-78. According to De Vaux the term *אֵשָׁה* is normally accompanied by the expression "a fragrance pleasing to Yahweh", hence implying that God accepts the sacrifice (Gen 8:21).

²⁰ David J. A. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 411.

²¹ Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 417. These ritual offerings are of three types the *זֶבַח תְּהֵנָה* 'sacrifice of praise' (Lv 7: 12-15; 22: 29-30), the *זֶבַח נֶדָבָה* 'sacrifice of devotion' (normally brought on by a precept or promise – Lv 7: 16-17; 22: 18-23) and the *זֶבַח נֶדָר* 'votive sacrifice' (whereby a person is bound by a vow – Lv 7: 16-17; 22: 18-23).

²² Ibid., 418.

²³ Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 198.

human and could easily be estimated in order to render a form of compensation.²⁴ While Clines notes that the term זָבַח is also used when one comes into contact with uncleanness rendering the term a guilt offering.²⁵ The victim offered to compensate for one's sins depended on the social and economical status of the person who had committed the sin.²⁶ De Vaux also notes that a bull was to be offered when the entire community was considered to have committed the offence against God, the same victim prescribed for the offences of the "anointed priest".²⁷ Here in the זָבַח הַדָּם sacrifice the blood of the victim plays a vital role more so than in any other form of sacrifice especially when the rite was being performed on behalf of the people or of the high priest.²⁸ For it is the only instance where the blood of the victim is taken into the Holy of Holies and rubbed upon the altar, it is also the only instance where the dismembered parts of the victim are carried within the confines of the Temple building.²⁹ Within the category of expiatory sacrifices the blood of the victim is crucial in expiating sin the reason being that 'blood' is equated to 'life' and is understood as the actual life, which rests within the flesh.³⁰ Leviticus 17: 11 attests to this reasoning that "the life of flesh is in its blood...for blood makes expiation, by reason of the life that is in it, a life."³¹

The sacrifice of reparation is dealt with more briefly and is normally understood as the rite employed to correct the offences committed by an individual.³²

²⁴ Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 79.

²⁵ Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 415.

²⁶ Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 418.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 419.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ M. Jack Suggs, Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, and James R. Mueller, *The Oxford Study Bible: Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 124. It is important to note that the fat of the victim was burned while the meat was consumed by the priests "...as a most holy thing" according to Leviticus 6: 22, which contradicts De Vaux's earlier argument that it is because the victim is loaded with the sins of the people that the offering becomes defiled and hence unacceptable to God.

³² Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 420.

The distinction between the *קטאת* sacrifice and the *אשם* sacrifice is that as mentioned earlier the *קטאת* offering can be made on behalf of an individual, the high priest and/or the entire community and it is the only rite where both the blood and the remains of the victim enter the vicinity of the Temple building while the *אשם* offering is only made on behalf of a 'regular' individual and the blood of the victim is never taken into the Holy of Holies nor is the victim burned away.³³ The purpose of the two rites however is much more difficult to distinguish as they are both utilized for the offences committed by an individual or group.³⁴

Last but not least we have the vegetable/grain offering referred to in Hebrew as the *מנחה* offering. The Hebrew word is most often rendered as 'gift' or tribute.³⁵ Clines, however notes that the *מנחה* offering can be representative of either a meat or grain offering.³⁶ He also clarifies that although the term can be understood as a 'tribute' he refrains from using the word 'gift' to describe the *מנחה* offering. Rather Clines presents the *מנחה* offering as something that is 'precious' and is 'brought near to' either the altar or the deity.³⁷ This particular ritual can be found within the second chapter of Leviticus. In all *מנחה* offerings the portion, which is to be burned on the altar, is referred to as the *אזכרה* and the precise meaning of this term, according to De Vaux, has not been established by scholars.³⁸ According to the BDB the Hebrew term can be derived from the nominal form *זָכַר*, which is rendered as memorial and/or

³³ Ibid. The description of both forms of offering can be found within Leviticus 5: 14-26.

³⁴ Ibid. Philo (*De Victimis*, II) believed the distinction to rest in the receiver of the offence, the *קטאת* sacrifice was offered for involuntary sins against another man while the *אשם* sacrifice was offered for involuntary sins against God, as well as all deliberate sins committed. Josephus (*Ant.* II ix 3) on the other hand understood the distinction to be offences committed without witnesses and those committed in front of witnesses. De Vaux stresses that even amongst modern scholars the opinions are varied.

³⁵ Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 585.

³⁶ Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 350. Clines notes that when the term is intended to depict a grain offering that the grains offered are either crushed or parched and at times they can also be mixed with oil or even baked.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 422.

remembrance.³⁹ Hence the offering should, according to the BDB, be understood as a memorial offering. Clines on the other hand has classified the term as deriving from the verb זָכַר 'to remember'.⁴⁰ The term אֶזְכָּרָה, according to Clines, is normally used as a nominal form and is translated as 'a token offering'.⁴¹ The מִנְחָה offering is normally offered and burned in combination with incense however De Vaux does note that there are several instance where the מִנְחָה is offered on its own (Lv 6: 13-16).⁴² Most frequently the מִנְחָה is offered alongside a sacrifice in which the victim's blood was shed, hence either a עֹלָה sacrifice or a זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים sacrifice (Ex 29: 40; Lv 23:13; Nb 15: 1-12).⁴³

Alternative Views of Sacrificial System

Hallo on the other hand offers a unique perspective to the development of ritualistic killing within the Hebrew Bible. He demonstrates that the Biblical attitude towards the sacrifice and consumption of animal meat is important in order to appreciate the distinctive transformation that the sacrificial system underwent.⁴⁴ He explains that in primeval history (Gen 1: 29-30) the reader is informed that men and beasts alike were vegetarians by divine command.⁴⁵ This divine command after the events of the flood under goes a transformation and is completely reversed, whereby now "every creature that lives shall be yours to eat ..." (Gen 9:3).⁴⁶ The only restriction then follows in the next verse and commands "you must not eat flesh with

³⁹ Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 272.

⁴⁰ Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 109.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 422.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ William W. Hallo, "The Origins of the Sacrificial Cult : New Evidence from Mesopotamia and Israel," in *Ancient Israelite Religion* (Philadelphia : Fortress Pr, 1987), 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

its life-blood in it" (Gen 9:4).⁴⁷ According to Hallo the divine command to consume meat takes on a completely different role in the legislation of the Holiness Code. The priestly document postulates that "the life of the flesh is in the blood and I have assigned it to you for making expiation for your lives upon the altar; it is the blood, as life, that effects expiation" (Lev 17: 11).⁴⁸ Hallo argues that the Levitical regulation renders the slaughter of an animal as a form of ritual, which will enable an individual to either give thanks or to repent before the deity. However if the sacrificial act is not performed at the authorized altar then the rite is no longer an act of sacrifice but rather is considered to be an act of slaughtering.⁴⁹

Despite their different approach to the rituals described in the Pentateuch both De Vaux and Hallo recognize that sacrifice and the offering up of slain animals for sacred purposes holds a prominent place in the cultic context of Ancient Israelite religion. As mentioned earlier the laws pertaining to sacrifice can be found within the first seven chapters of the book of Leviticus. Jill Robbins however discusses the act of sacrifice found in these seven chapters in quite a different manner than both Hallo and de Vaux. Robbins observes that there is a distinction between two separate categories of offerings; propitiary offerings and dedicatory offerings.⁵⁰ He defines propitiary offerings as offerings normally rendered for atonement of sins and for purification purposes while dedicatory offerings are normally understood as gifts for the deity.⁵¹ The idea of substitution and expiation is prominent within the first category of

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Jill Robbins, "Sacrifice," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Pr, 1998), 285.

⁵¹ Ibid.

sacrifice, and as Robbins notes we first encounter this form in the very first chapter of Leviticus the idea to substitute an animal victim in the place of the sinner's life.⁵²

According to Robbins these offerings are distinguished in terms of the matter, the mode and even the place of sacrifice.⁵³ In ancient Israel's cultic practice we find the "meal" offering, which is most commonly referred to as the מִנְחָה and as mentioned earlier normally translated as a "gift" offering.⁵⁴ Robbins also makes note that another form of offering is the "burnt" offering, which we saw earlier was identified as עֹלָה, Robbins' explains that the term is understood as "that which goes up" (referring to the smoke) hence describing the mode of delivery of the sacrifice.⁵⁵ Most importantly it is the term used in Genesis 22 when God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son, hence indicating that the offering required was a "burnt offering".⁵⁶

Unlike de Vaux Robbins describes the term זָבַח as a term most often used in the Hebrew Bible in respect to the slaughter of animals both for religious purposes as well as for ordinary consumption.⁵⁷ He then moves on to explain that the religious meal associated with the זָבַח offering is one, which presents the altar with an animal victim and once the animal is sacrificed it is then in part returned to the worshipper to be eaten under special provisions.⁵⁸ The final term discussed by Robbins is the Hebrew term קָרָבַן, which is exclusively utilized in respect to religious sacrifice, and

⁵² Ibid. "He must lay his hand on the head of the victim and it will be accepted on his behalf to make expiation for him. He must then slaughter the bull before the Lord, and the Aaronite priests are to present the blood and fling it against the sides of the altar at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting." (Lv 1: 4-5).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Rudolf Kittel et al., *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1997), 31.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶת-בְּנֵךְ אֶת-יִצְחָק אֲשֶׁר-אַהֲבָה אֶת-יִצְחָק וְלֹךְ-לָךְ אֶל-אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לֵעֹלָה עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֶמַּר אֵלֶיךָ:

God said, "Take your son, your one and only son Isaac whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a **burnt offering** on one of the heights which I will show you." (Gen 22: 2).

⁵⁷ Robbins, "Sacrifice," 286.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

much like de Vaux Robbins characterizes the term as the idea of “approaching” or “bringing near” (most probably to the altar).⁵⁹

Robbins in his presentation of Israelite cultic sacrifice argues that the ‘original’ cultic meaning was already to some extent lost at the time of the redaction of the Hebrew Bible.⁶⁰ As noted in the beginning of the first chapter many scholars argue that sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible is a legacy of Israel’s ‘pagan’ environment. However scholars such as Yehezkel Kaufmann have demonstrated that despite the fact that a connecting thread does seem to exist between Israel and her ‘pagan’ environment that Israelite religion is to be understood as an original creation of the people of Israel and not born out of the worldviews offered by its surrounding pagan neighbors.⁶¹

Anthropological Approach

We have established that the role of sacrifice/offering is a prominent aspect of the cultic context of ancient Israelite religion. The sacrifice described up to this point has been that of animal sacrifice but what about child sacrifice, how is one to comprehend the ritualistic killing of a human being? Since we have not found any description within the priestly material of any literal form of human sacrifice we must now turn to the anthropological theories concerning the ritual of sacrifice.

Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss

One of the most significant and influential anthropological theory of sacrifice was formulated in 1898 by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss who defined sacrifice as

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel, from Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (London: Allen, 1961), 2.

“a procedure which consists in establishing a communication between the sacred and the profane worlds, by the intermediary of a victim, that is, a consecrated thing which is destroyed in the course of the ceremony”.⁶² The ritualistic act of sacrifice allows for both the subject and the object to move from the common profane aspects of life and into the sacred realm of the deity.⁶³ Hubert and Mauss also identify the performance of sacrifice as a ritualistic act, which mediates the arrival of or the departure of the divine.⁶⁴ Furthermore the individual who performs the act of sacrifice is perceived as one who opens a widow, which allows him to communicate with the divine hence allowing the ritual act of sacrifice to modify the condition of the person who performs it.⁶⁵

René Girard

René Girard on the other hand presents the act of ritualistic killing as an act motivated by the human desire for violence, a ritualistic collective murder of an arbitrarily chosen victim.⁶⁶ Girard postulates that the ritualistic murder needs to be understood not as a simple subject-object equation but rather that one should step back and see that at the heart of sacrifice lies the human instinct of rivalry.⁶⁷ It is this situation of rivalry which Girard accords for the dominant role within the sacrificial system. For rivalry is to be understood as cyclical, it is all but natural that family and friends will attempt to seek vengeance for their deceased loved ones.⁶⁸ According to Girard what ends the vicious cycle of violent killings is an act of unanimous violence

⁶² Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 97.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, *Violence Et Le Sacré*. English (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 144-45.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

whereby a community channels all blame to a single surrogate victim.⁶⁹ The surrogate victim not only puts an end to the destructive cycle of violence but it also simultaneously initiates the constructive cycle of sacrificial rite.⁷⁰ For Girard the only positive function of sacrifice is simply to prevent the cycle of violence from reoccurring and to restore peace and harmony to the community.⁷¹

Walter Burkert

Unlike Girard who defines sacrifice as the original act of 'scapegoating' Walter Burkert attempts to explain the term sacrifice by trying to identify and to understand the relationship between the act of killing and the ritual act performed for religious purposes.⁷² Burkert focuses a great deal on sacrifice as killing and justifies sacrifice as a means of human survival, by associating it to hunting.⁷³ Hubert and Mauss differ with Burkert and clarify that sacrifice should not be dismissed as a simple act of hunting meant solely for survival purposes rather they explain that ancient sacrifice cannot be reduced to any single motive.⁷⁴ Unfortunately Burkert fails to properly answer the question of how it is that the act of killing for survival was then made into a sacred rite. R.K Yerkes attempts to shed some light on the possible development of the sacrificial system. He explicates that within 'primitive' societies that myth and ritual were combined in such a way as to create the necessary elements to render what otherwise was regarded as an essentially 'profane' slaughter into a sacred act, hence making the ritualistic killing 'holy'.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Ibid., 85-86.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 93.

⁷¹ Ibid., 8.

⁷² Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans : The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, Homo Necans. English (Berkeley University of California Press, 1983), xxiii-xxv.

⁷³ Ibid., 16-18.

⁷⁴ Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, 18.

⁷⁵ Royden Keith Yerkes, *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism*, The Hale Lectures; 1951 (New York Scribner, 1952), 25-26.

Bruce Chilton

Bruce Chilton observes that in general peoples who sacrifice believe that they and/ or their deity are different after the sacrifice from what they were beforehand.⁷⁶ Chilton moves on to argue that sacrifice is a feast whereby the one who performs the ritual act is able to interact with the divine.⁷⁷ The feast, which represents life as it should be, chosen and prepared correctly, is accepted in order to produce life as it ought to be.⁷⁸ And so sacrifice is to be understood according to Chilton as a celebration of consumption and of being consumed.⁷⁹ Unlike Girard who focuses on the violence of the ritual act of sacrifice and on the death of the victims Chilton believes that the emphasis should be placed on the role of eating rather than on the killing itself. It is obvious that the function of sacrifice in Ancient Israel is about more than just killing. However, Chilton places a great deal of weight on the importance of eating and fails to address a prominent aspect of Ancient Israel's sacrificial system that is the burnt-offering which allows for none of the flesh to be eaten. Chilton demonstrates that food consumption plays a principal role within the Ancient Greek sacrificial system however this important aspect should not be over generalized and applied as a central focus of Ancient Israel.

Howard Eilberg-Schwartz

Howard Eilberg-Schwartz moves away from the idea that sacrifice should be viewed as a feast and argues that sacrifice is a much simpler system based on the idea

⁷⁶ Bruce Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus : His Sacrificial Program within a Cultural History of Sacrifice* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 41.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

of substitution.⁸⁰ Eilberg-Schwartz argues that the sacrificial system rests on the idea that an animal's life is a substitute for the life of the person who brings the animal to be slaughtered.⁸¹ He moves on to state that the sacrificial ritual itself suggests an identification of the sacrificial animal with the individual performing the ritual act.⁸² Eilberg-Schwartz develops in his explanation of sacrifice the idea that ritual is to be understood as the 'actualization of metaphor'.⁸³ Hence it is not the ritual itself that sheds light on the metaphor but rather that the metaphor allows for the ritual's symbolic value to be recognized within the Israelite social structure.⁸⁴ He also points out another important point that is that the dependence of the sacrificial system on the metaphoric relationship between Ancient Israel and the herds and flocks explains why only animals from within their own herds and flocks can be used as offerings.⁸⁵ Consequently the victim that is to be sacrificed, which normally serves as the metaphor for Israel, is the only one that can be used as a sacrificial substitution for Israel.⁸⁶

Jacob Milgrom

Jacob Milgrom on the other hand identifies sacrifice as a literal action, that is, that sacrifice only made sense when the individual performing the act literally believed that they were feeding the deity consequently leading Milgrom to further observe that ancient rituals were nothing more than fossilized vestiges.⁸⁷ Milgrom seems to follow in the path of evolutionist thinking for he assumes that language

⁸⁰ Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism : An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1990), 125.

⁸¹ Ibid., 135.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 122.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 135.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16 : A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible ; V. 3 (New York Doubleday, 1991), 440.

develops from the literal to the metaphorical.⁸⁸ For Milgrom the final stage of intellectual and ritual development within Ancient Israel comes when sacrifice, which is regarded by Milgrom as a 'primitive' ritual comes to an end.⁸⁹ He perceives the development of sacrificial rite as one, which begins with an idolatrous conception and then moves towards an ethical understanding of the ritual.⁹⁰ As stated earlier Milgrom assumes that metaphor is a relatively late development in human thought thus placing the literal understanding of sacrifice in a primitive stage of human development. Jonathan Klawans notes that there is an obvious problem with the evolutionist approach to sacrifice; that is that by nature it precludes the possibility that sacrifice was understood symbolically by those Israelites who performed it.⁹¹ Klawans moves on to observe that the origin of the ritual is then set back in a pre-metaphorical era and symbolic thought, the essence of metaphor, only comes to the forefront at a later time.⁹²

Mary Douglas

Mary Douglas addresses this evolutionist view by attempting to move away from the linear development that has come to define ritualism as being evolutionary in nature. She asserts that it is this approach to sacrifice, which has depicted the so-called "primitive" rituals described in the Old Testament as lacking ethics due to their magical and superstitious elements.⁹³ Douglas explains that the more personal and intimate the source of the ritual symbolism the more telling its message.⁹⁴ The more

⁸⁸ Ibid., 1003.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple : Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 32.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1966), 17.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 141.

the symbol is drawn from the common fund of human experience the more wide and certain its reception.⁹⁵ According to Douglas ritual is an attempt to create and maintain a particular culture and a particular set of assumptions by which experience is controlled.⁹⁶ There is unquestionably a relation between individual preoccupations and ritual actions.⁹⁷ Douglas also points out that ritual draws upon individual experience it does so selectively which indicates that the goal and purpose of ritual extends much further than trying to solve individual problems.⁹⁸ Klawans who strongly agrees with Douglas states that the ritual act of sacrifice was symbolically understood and that the individuals performing the sacrifice were viewed as using metaphors in relation to their actions.⁹⁹ Most importantly is that the objective of ritual is not negative withdrawal from reality.¹⁰⁰ The rituals enact the form of social relations and in giving these relations visible expression they enable people to know and understand their own society.¹⁰¹ She moves on to explain that a ritual provides a frame, marking off time and space, which alerts a special kind of expectancy much like the oft-repeated "Once upon a time".¹⁰² Hence the framing function facilitates the reception of the symbolism produced by the ritual enactment allowing the present to be linked with the relevant past.¹⁰³

Edmund Leach

Edmund Leach also operates under the assumption that the sacrificial rules constitute a symbolic system. Rituals are by nature symbolic and expressive; Leach

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 158.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple : Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, 47.

¹⁰⁰ Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 158.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 159.

¹⁰² Ibid., 78.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 79.

asserts that sacrificial rituals are indeed metaphorical.¹⁰⁴ According to Leach the purpose of religious performance is to provide a bridge or channel of communication through which the power of the deity may be made available to otherwise impotent men.¹⁰⁵ He moves on to explain that the person to whom the ritual activity is addressed is normally associated to a sacred place and is typically regarded as an ancestor, saint or incarnate deity.¹⁰⁶ The metaphysical person moves from formerly ordinary man who died an ordinary death to an individual who is now immortalized due to his ritualistic actions.¹⁰⁷ Leach defines a sacrificial offering as either a gift, or tribute, or fine paid to the deity.¹⁰⁸ The performance of the sacrifice is an expression of the principle of reciprocity, hence by making a gift to the deity, the deity is compelled to give back benefits to man.¹⁰⁹ However, Leach is quick to note that the metaphor of gift giving can easily prove to be misleading for the divine does not need presents from men rather it requires signs of submission.¹¹⁰ Leach reinforces his understanding of sacrifice by concluding that what matters is the act of sacrifice in and of itself, which is seen as a symbol of gift giving but that the physical act of gift giving should be understood as an expression of reciprocal relationship rather than a material exchange.¹¹¹ Leach demonstrates that many theorists such as Milgrom have fallen into a trap because they presumed that the "primitives" were incapable of metaphorical thought. They have taken the sacrificial metaphor of gift giving and have literalized it rendering their theories unconvincing.¹¹² The evolutionist argument that

¹⁰⁴ Edmund Ronald Leach, *Culture & Communication : The Logic by Which Symbols Are Connected : An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology*, Themes in the Social Sciences (Cambridge [Eng.] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 83-84.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 82.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 83.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

the ritualistic act of sacrifice is devoid of symbolism and hence to be understood only in a literal fashion has given rise to the erroneous interpretation that the metaphorical meaning of ritual could only develop alongside an evolving society.

Ritual as Metaphor

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that language is to be viewed as providing that which can lead to general principles of understanding.¹¹³ These general principles involve whole systems of concepts rather than individual words or ideas.¹¹⁴ It is on the premise of attempting to identify these general principles that Lakoff and Johnson have come to conclude that such principles are often metaphoric in nature and involve understanding one kind of experience in terms of another kind of experience.¹¹⁵ They move on to state that metaphors are grounded in our constant interaction with our physical and cultural environments.¹¹⁶ Metaphors have the capability of giving an individual a new understanding of their own experience.¹¹⁷ Thus Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphors can give new meaning to one's past, daily activity and to what an individual knows and believes.¹¹⁸ Traditionally metaphors have been viewed as an issue of language rather than as a means of structuring one's conceptual system and performance of everyday activity.¹¹⁹ Moreover it is important to note that according to Lakoff and Johnson the conceptual systems of various cultures partly depends on the physical environment in which they

¹¹³ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 116.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 119.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 139.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 145.

have developed. Hence each culture requires a method of developing a successful way to deal with its environment by being able to both adapt to it and change it.¹²⁰

Eilberg-Schwartz suggests that within Ancient Israel the application of metaphors is used to reflect upon human life and social experience, which frequently revolved around animal life and agriculture.¹²¹ Furthermore he states that Israelite religious thought, as expressed in prophetic genres, poetry and narratives of the Hebrew Bible, relies self-consciously on a whole host of natural metaphors drawn from the domains of animal husbandry and agricultural life.¹²² As in many traditional societies, fauna and agriculture supplied a rich vocabulary for thinking about social and religious life.¹²³ According to Eilberg-Schwartz for Ancient Israel these metaphors provided a language for conceptualizing the relationship of Israel to its neighbours and to God.¹²⁴

In his argument he points out that God is frequently described as the shepherd of Israel, the divine flock.¹²⁵ The image expresses the conviction that God is the protector of Israel but Eilberg-Schwartz further suggests that we must not lose sight of the fact that at times God is also the shepherd who brings his flock to slaughter.¹²⁶ For Eilberg-Schwartz faunal and agricultural imagery provide the necessary vocabulary for expressing the theological, national, social and moral conceptions of the Israelite community.¹²⁷ For the reason that when you have only one God and that God does not

¹²⁰ Ibid., 146.

¹²¹ Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism : An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism*, 117.

¹²² Ibid., 119.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 120. Eilberg-Schwartz offers the following Biblical passages as example; Ezek. 34:31; 36:37.

¹²⁶ Ibid. Eilberg-Schwartz offers the following Biblical passages as example; Jer. 12:3; Pss. 44:12, 23; 74:1.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 121.

engage in very many human activities, it is difficult to represent social relationships in terms of theological statements.¹²⁸

He affirms that the very premise of the sacrificial system is that God will permit Israelites to sacrifice animals instead of sacrificing themselves and their children.¹²⁹ If this is indeed the case, then what is the narrative of Genesis 22 attempting to convey to its readers? For Eilberg-Schwartz the narrative of Genesis 22 is a story that expresses the idea that although people theoretically owe their lives to God, God is sometimes willing to accept animals in their place. Therefore Genesis 22, according to Eilberg-Schwartz explanation, is to be viewed as a simple case of substitution. A conclusion that Robbins considers is erroneous.

In light of Leach's as well as Hubert and Mauss' understanding of sacrifice Robbins argues that when Abraham is ready to "sacrifice" his one and only son and to give that death to God that the sacrifice can no longer be understood in terms of substitution as Eilberg-Schwartz would argue because that which is being offered by Abraham is not being used for exchange or barter but rather the ritualistic act should really be understood as a means of establishing a relationship between the divine and the one who performs the sacrificial act.¹³⁰

Baruch Levine presents a similar argument to that of Robbins and explains that sacrifice is to be understood in light of the presence of God.¹³¹ He argues that there are times when an individual may fear the nearness of God but he normally must risk the dangers attendant on the divine presence for the blessings he hopes to receive from the divinity.¹³² It is precisely the desire of God's presence within the community, which

¹²⁸ Ibid., 139.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 135.

¹³⁰ Robbins, "Sacrifice," 289.

¹³¹ Baruch A. Levine, "On the Presence of God in Biblical Religion," in *Religions in Antiquity; Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 73.

¹³² Ibid.

motivates most of the regular aspects of religious life.¹³³ Levine argues that God comes to the worshipper he draws near to him, when he is about to grant him blessings.¹³⁴ Hence the desire to be within the divine presence is to be viewed as a symbolic code for the reception of blessings.

Klawans notes that one value of understanding the act of ritual sacrifice as a metaphor is that the reader is encouraged to think of the roles played by both the worshipper and the victim. He moves on to remark that an important aspect of sacrifice, which too often is tossed to the side, is the role of the victim. The victim according to Klawans succumbs to a death that is far from being natural, on the contrary the death of the victim is a highly controlled one.¹³⁵ The violence of sacrifice is neither random nor indiscriminate¹³⁶ as Girard has posited in his theory of sacrifice but rather is orderly and contained. Klawans moves on to argue that the victim chosen fit for the sacrifice is powerless and accepts his faith without any struggle,¹³⁷ which is very different from Burkert's understanding of sacrifice as a hunt. Klawans observes that it is precisely this control and feeling of subordination that Israel's God exercises over human beings.¹³⁸ If one understands the role of the victim as being a simple innocent bystander or as being offered for the purpose of expiation then one is not fully grasping the ritual act of sacrifice.

Along the same line of thought as Klawans, Buchanan Gray views the particular sacrifice of Isaac as being much more than a simple act of expiation. In fact Gray argues that the narrative of Genesis 22 does not describe a situation, which

¹³³ Ibid., 72.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 79.

¹³⁵ Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple : Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, 58.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

would warrant an act of propitiation.¹³⁹ Given that the reader is presented with a relationship, which is in complete harmony wherein God is wholly pleased with Abraham and Abraham is wholly devoted to God.¹⁴⁰

I have demonstrated that there exists a wide consensus, which concludes that Ancient Israelites conceived of sacrifice not primarily as a solution to the problem of transgression but rather as a productive expression of their religious ideals and hopes in order to maintain the divine presence among them. Furthermore the intent of sacrifice found within the narrative of Genesis 22 can now be understood a great deal more clearly in light of the explications offered by the anthropological approach to sacrifice. As Lakoff and Johnson mentioned in their presentation of metaphor; metaphors are grounded in the physical and cultural environment of the community which is to receive its symbolic meaning. Therefore in order to properly identify the symbolic code of Genesis 22 we will need to discern where and when the narrative was written as well as attempt to understand the motives and intent of the author of this particular story. An endeavour that will be further examined and analyzed in the following chapter.

¹³⁹ George Buchanan Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament, Its Theory and Practice* (Oxford: The Clarendon press, 1925), 92.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

AUTHORSHIP AND SETTING

In the mid 1970's the earlier paradigm which saw scholars uphold the reliability of the portrayal of a patriarchal age was vigorously challenged by several scholars. John Van Seters was one of these as he sought to demonstrate that the narratives in Genesis should not be understood as a development of the patriarchal period but rather that the literary motifs utilized by the author reflected the historical context of a much later period.

Although scholars have agreed that some of the foundational elements of the narrative of Genesis 22 can be dated to an earlier period the core of the narrative seems to assume a much later date.¹ Hence the understanding of human sacrifice needs to be related to the understanding of the author and editors of the narrative, who according to several scholars were not living in the patriarchal period.

Personal Names

The central argument for dating the 'patriarchal period' to the 2nd millennium B.C.E. concerns the personal names, which have been identified as similar to those found in extra-biblical sources.² J. Bright suggests that these names of the patriarchs correspond very closely with West-Semitic (Amorite) names of that period.³ R. de Vaux also suggests that the identification of the period to which the personal names belong to requires that the 'patriarchal' names be paralleled to those names which are

¹ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Bible. English. Anchor Bible. 1964. 1 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), xxvii.

² Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft. 133 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1974), 17.

³ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, [Westminster Aids to the Study of the Scriptures] (Louisville, Ky: Westminster J. Knox Press, 2000), 70.

similar or identical to those found in extra-biblical materials.⁴ Hence allowing scholars to establish the period in which these 'types' of names were most likely to occur. Van Seters disagrees with Bright and de Vaux's argument and notes that there are two fundamental problems. The first is that most of the names are eponyms of tribes, which mean's that while the tribal entities may go back to the second millennium the narratives in respect to the eponymous ancestors may be a much later reflection.⁵ Hence Van Seters concludes that a discussion about such names may be of significance when dealing with the question of the origin of the tribes and their settlements but has no real bearing on the dating of the patriarchal narratives.⁶ The second problem, which Van Seters notes, is that this dating technique produces inconclusive results. The reason being that most of the features which characterize West-Semitic names of the early second millennium can be found in those of the late second millennium as well and in many Canaanite or Phoenician, Aramaic, Arabic, Nabatean and Palmyrene names throughout the first millennium B.C.E.⁷ T.L. Thompson agrees with Van Seters and adds that the argument put forward by both Bright and de Vaux is faulty because it presupposes that someone bearing a 'patriarchal' name would have only lived at the time of the earliest occurrence of the name in question.⁸ Thompson also notes that there has been a great deal of neglect concerning the patriarchal names which occur in periods that are not from the so-called 'patriarchal period' of the 2nd millennium B.C.E. hence rendering their argumentation biased.⁹ Van Seters' concludes that the author's intent was most likely

⁴ Roland de Vaux, "Method in the Study of Early Hebrew History," in *Bible in Modern Scholarship* (1965), 26.

⁵ John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 39.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁸ Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*, 17.

⁹ Ibid.

to relate the ancestors of Israel and therefore Israel itself to the two major peoples (Amorites and Arabs), which dominated the world of the Neo-Babylonian period.¹⁰

Customs

Other scholars have argued that the customs described in the "patriarchal" narratives are perhaps the most conclusive criterion for considering the Genesis narratives as early second millennium creations. The argument rests on the understanding that the account of certain family customs, laws and other forms of social traditions were integral to the course of the narrative as certain details pertaining to these traditions could not be changed without changing the entire tradition itself.¹¹ Many Old Testament scholars, such as Bright, have presupposed that the patriarchal customs and traditions depicted in Genesis could only be understood as coming out of the second millennium period.¹² Parallels used to demonstrate that such customs and traditions were particular to the second millennium are most often drawn from written legal documents.¹³ Van Seters notes that in order to render a fair assessment on the question of possible parallels between the Old Testament narratives and the legal material found within the ancient Near East, consideration needs to be given to the question of cultural continuity and change in the later periods.¹⁴ He cites the example of the Law Code of Hammurabi and moves on to explain that the legal material was still highly esteemed in the later period, which suggests considerable continuity.¹⁵ On the basis of this argument Van Seters states that it would be unwise to

¹⁰ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 40.

¹¹ Ibid., 65. Van Seters gives his readers the following example; "the social practice of giving a maid to one's husband."

¹² Bright, *A History of Israel*, 78-79.

¹³ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 65.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 67.

conclude that earlier practices were completely forgotten or replaced in later times.¹⁶ Another problem with current comparative analysis pertains to the manner in which parallels have been “forced” upon the Old Testament narratives. According to Van Seters it is not legitimate to give a wholesale reconstruction of the tradition “as it must have been” in order to make the parallel fit, or to emend the narrative to include certain details vital to the comparison.¹⁷

Nomadism

Scholars have also questioned the use of the term “nomadism” as evidence for placing the patriarchal narratives in the actual “patriarchal” period. Here the argument rests on the archaeological description of the Early Bronze (EB) Age IV to Middle Bronze (MB) Age I Period as a time in which Semi-Nomadic groups occupied Palestine.¹⁸ Thompson explains that it is mostly the association made between the shaft-tomb people and the Amorites that has led scholars, such as W. Dever, to assume that the inhabitants of EB IV/ MB I Palestine were semi-nomads.¹⁹ He moves on to state that although the evidence found at the archaeological sites demonstrate limited settlements in contrast to a large number of tombs that one should not assume that the only possible conclusion is that the archaeological evidence bears witness to the remnants of several camp-sites.²⁰

Van Seters on the other hand notes that most of the stories within Genesis seem to portray what he calls a “general pastoralism”.²¹ Considering the basic characteristics of nomadism the stories found within the patriarchal framework reflect

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 68.

¹⁸ Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*, 165.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 13.

little of the nomadic way of life.²² Moreover as Van Seters notes a distinction is normally made between the patriarchs and the “full fledged” nomads of the desert.²³ He describes Abraham, as the most “nomadic” of the patriarchal triad but the frequent references to tents and camels seems to indicate a first millennium phenomenon.²⁴ Scholars such as W.F. Albright have posited that the narratives within Genesis are to be understood as biographical, representing actions of the tribes rather than that of the individual characters in the stories, consequently Albright suggests that the travels of the patriarchs as depicted in Genesis are to be understood as tribal migrations.²⁵ Van Seters on the other hand refutes Albright’s argument of a nomadic migration and explains that the narratives seem to assume that the Amorites have already settled in their respective regions, particularly the Upper Euphrates, and that the Arab population is also already part of the scenery of desert life within the semi-desert regions of South-East Palestine and the Transjordan.²⁶ The narratives, which do describe Abraham’s so-called migration from the Amorite region of Harran to Palestine and Jacob’s journey to and from Harran, suggest a period no earlier than the late Assyrian Empire.²⁷ While the narratives, which depict Abraham’s journey from the Chaldean region of Ur to Harran, Van Seters describes as historical allusions to the time of Nabonidus.²⁸ Thompson also makes note that the argument put forth by Albright is problematic as there is no direct evidence of the patriarchs themselves, Albright’s conclusions are drawn from discoveries made of similar events.²⁹

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 15.

²⁵ William Foxwell Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*, Harper Torchbooks (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 5.

²⁶ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 16.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*, 52.

Hence Van Seters concludes that the journeys depicted by the patriarchal narratives as being possible “migrations” can hardly be construed as “nomadic”, the portrayals offered by the narratives would be more appropriately classified as pastoral life.³⁰ A way of life more so connected to the period of the late Judean monarchy and/or exilic periods than a “full fledged patriarchal” period.³¹ Van Seters’ moves on to state that there is little support for any antiquity of the patriarchal age in the book of Genesis and the attempts by scholars to portray a “Patriarchal Age” in the second millennium as the historical background for the narratives found in the book of Genesis should be viewed as circumstantial and misleading.³²

Arguments based on reconstructing the patriarch’s nomadic way of life, the personal names in Genesis, the social customs reflected in the stories and correlation of the traditions of Genesis with the archaeological data of the middle bronze age have all been found to be quite deficient in demonstrating an origin for the Abraham tradition in the second millennium B.C.E. Van Seters notes that the degree to which the stories reflect any oral tradition may be explained entirely by the use of folkloric forms and motifs that were accessible to Israelite culture throughout its history and not primarily by the deposit of a preliterate period.³³ There is no way of identifying when oral narrative forms or motifs became associated with a particular person such as Abraham, and it could well have happened in any case when the story was first being put into a written form.³⁴

³⁰ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 19.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 121.

³³ Ibid., 310.

³⁴ John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 287.

Literary Composition

A date for the literary formation of the book of Genesis is normally closely associated to the hypotheses surrounding the literary source referred to as the Yahwist (J). Scholars such as C. Westermann have maintained that the Yahwist was a compiler or "bearer of tradition" whose intention was not to create an original literary work.³⁵ Furthermore, Westermann understands the Yahwist as belonging to the latest stage of the literary process and this process in question was taking place during the time of the Monarchy.³⁶ However, many scholars such as J. Wellhausen felt that there was a lack of homogeneity within the source identified as J and that this lack of unity was problematic in establishing an independent source.³⁷ T.C. Römer suggests that Wellhausen was not interested in distinguishing a J source, for this was an unnecessary and impossible task and preferred to combine J and E documents together to form a source known as the 'Yehovist' (JE).³⁸ Later scholars such as C. Bruston, K. Budde and R. Smend who followed in Wellhausen's footsteps attempted to identify distinct editions of the Yahwist document in order to compensate for the lack of uniformity.³⁹

Van Seters rejects the hypothesis proposed by Westermann of a Monarchic date as well as all other scholars who suggest that the Yahwist was a compiler and who as a result fixed the development of the oral tradition into a written form with very little contribution of his own.⁴⁰ Van Seters on the other hand argues that the

³⁵ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, 33-35.

³⁶ Ibid., 58.

³⁷ Thomas Christian Römer, "The Elusive Yahwist : A Short History of Research," in *A Farewell to the Yahwist?: The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid, *Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series ; No. 34* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2006), 13.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁰ Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis*, 287.

Yahwistic version of the tradition dates to the exilic period.⁴¹ This dating of the Yahwist is based on the fact that “while he consciously portrays a primitive age without the political structures of a later day he still gives frequent clues to his own time”.⁴² His use of various designations for the indigenous inhabitants is quite “unhistorical and reflects the development of such archaisms” in the late period of the monarchy.⁴³ Van Seters also suggests that the author’s prominent use of tribal communities (i.e. Amorites and Arabs) particularly those around the region of Harran and the north Arabia as well as the Negeb reflect a late date.⁴⁴ The references to Ur and the Chaldeans and its close connections with Harran and the West, point most clearly to the late Neo-Babylonian period.⁴⁵ Even the portrayal of the nomadic elements in the story with camels and tents, points to a time when such Bedouin were most prominent that is in the mid-first millennium B.C.E.⁴⁶ Hence Van Seters’ refutes the possibility of the Genesis “patriarchal” narratives being the product of an actual “patriarchal age” as well as possibly developing during a Monarchic period and points his readers in a different direction and proposes that the tradition as it stands reflects a later date of composition.

Pentateuchal Redaction Hypotheses

The composition of Genesis 22, as stated earlier, must be viewed as a purely literary creation and as a result scholars have developed several hypotheses on how to deal with the inconsistencies, which are clearly manifest in the Pentateuch. R.N. Whybray explains that in order to deal with the literary ‘problems’ of the Pentateuch

⁴¹ ———, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 309.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 310.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

three main solutions have evolved; the first is known as the 'Fragmentary Hypothesis,' and states that the narratives were compiled by a single author who gathered together several independent shorter pieces to form a somewhat disorganized massive unit.⁴⁷ Secondly we have what is known as the 'Supplement Hypothesis,' which identifies a single author as being at the core of the Pentateuch but that for reasons unknown later writers made additions that distorted the original unified account.⁴⁸ Lastly we have what is referred to, as the 'Documentary Hypothesis,' which suggests that the Pentateuch is the result of a combination of smaller but more extensive works, written independently and at different periods by different editors or 'redactors' whose works were eventually interwoven together to form a single unit.⁴⁹ The Graf-Wellhausen documentary hypothesis to this day still remains the point of departure for most source criticism. Briefly the hypothesis claims that the Pentateuch took shape in a series of stages in which, over the course of several centuries, four original distinct 'documents' (J, E, D, and P) each written by different authors in different periods were then eventually placed together by a series of 'redactors'.⁵⁰

However, for the study of the book of Genesis it is more accurate to speak of J, E, and P, although Van Seters notes that this does not exclude the possibility of Deuteronomistic glosses.⁵¹ Van Seters notes that it is by separating the 'priestly' and 'non-priestly' material that one can begin to identify the markedly different characters of the other sources.⁵² The initial point of departure for distinguishing between sources has been identifying the presence of doublets in the non-priestly corpus—that

⁴⁷ Roger N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study* (England: JSOT Press, 1987), 17.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 17-18.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁵¹ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 125.

⁵² John Van Seters, *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary*, Trajectories; 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 24.

is parallel accounts of essentially the same episode.⁵³ The conclusions drawn from these studies of doublets is that they pointed to two independent sources and that one source had a preference for the divine name Yahweh (J) while the other source used the more common form Elohim (E) to designate the national deity.⁵⁴ Other criteria used to distinguish between the two redactional forms have been the evidence of repetition, contradictions, variation in vocabulary and breaks in narrative continuity.⁵⁵ According to Van Seters these criteria have created as many problems as they have solved and have rarely been applied absolutely.⁵⁶ For instance, the divine names at times can be utilized to distinguish clear blocks of material for the two sources but in other instances the alternation in the use of the divine epithet has resulted in the complete fragmentation of otherwise cohesive stories and episodes.⁵⁷ The effort to identify distinct terminology within these parallels is problematic as they do not cover all of the material found in the patriarchal narratives and the explanation may not necessarily relate to the distinction between the literary sources.⁵⁸ The question, which needs to be raised is whether the element used as a criterion for distinguishing one "source" as opposed to another reflects the tradition acquired by the author or if it reflects a genuine expression of the author's own perspective and attitude?

According to Van Seters there are two basic methods of approach used in the study of the patriarchal narratives, the archaeological-historical and the tradition-historical method.⁵⁹ Scholars of both groups have suggested that behind the narratives of the patriarchs lies an older tradition from a very early period in Israel's history or pre-history but scholars differ widely in their respective understanding as to the nature

⁵³ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁴ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 126.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ ———, *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary*, 27.

⁵⁷ ———, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 127.

⁵⁸ ———, *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary*, 27.

⁵⁹ ———, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 228.

of this tradition.⁶⁰ G. E. Wright views this older tradition as containing a memory of a nomadic time period in Israel's history when change in the cult practice was being implemented.⁶¹ Hence he states that Abraham's sacrifice in chapter 22 is concerned in its present form to portray Abraham's faithful obedience, "yet at one stage it must once have been concerned with the abolition of child sacrifice".⁶² Wright is one of the scholars, which Van Seters categorizes as fitting in well with the "historical orientation" that sees the various customs and practices in the patriarchal narratives as reflections of an earlier period.⁶³ The other view, according to Van Seters, regards the goal of the narrative not as an event but as an explanation and hence ascribes to it an etiological character.⁶⁴ The explanation may also be concerned with a change in cult practice but it is especially seen in verse 14 as the etiological formula for the naming of the sacred place. Van Seters moves on to explain that due to the etiological formula the narrative is then viewed as a cult-legend tied to a specific sanctuary and not to a specific people.⁶⁵ In fact, the narrative has been regarded by scholars as being originally Canaanite and only later on taken over by Israel after they had settled in the region.⁶⁶ Therefore, the two methodological positions allow the reader to either view the narrative as originating from an old non-etiological folk tradition that is understood to represent the people in their earlier pre-historical period or to view the narrative as a cult-legend that in origin is non-Israelite and belonged to a local sanctuary. In both cases then it would be understood that at a later stage in the process of "oral" tradition the patriarchs would have been connected to the stories.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ G.E. Wright, "Modern Issues in Biblical Studies: History and the Patriarchs," *Ex Times* 71 (1959-1960): 293.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 228.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

The Yahwist versus the Elohist

Apart from verses 15-18, which are usually regarded as a later addition, the rest of the narrative (vv. 1-14, 19) according to some scholars is normally ascribed to E.⁶⁸ The arguments that are used to identify this source are as follows: 1) the use of Elohim verses 1, 3, 8, 9, 12; 2) the “Angel” calling from heaven verse 11; 3) the reference to Beersheba as the primary abode of Abraham verse 19.⁶⁹ Van Seters notes that the problem with the first criterion is that the name Yahweh appears in both verse 11 and twice in verse 14. He then moves on to state that one solution offered by scholars is to suggest that the divine name Yahweh belongs to a previous level of the tradition.⁷⁰ E.A. Speiser suggests that the designation Elohim has been changed to Yahweh by a post-Elohistic redactor.⁷¹ In both cases Van Seters notes that the solutions seem arbitrary and only weakens the divine name criterion.⁷² Van Seters also explains that other criterion would only be significant if the previous episode in chapter 21: 8ff also belonged to the E source.⁷³ However, this is not the case, chapter 21: 8ff is normally identified as the work of J, which would suggest that the “angel from heaven” מַלְאָךְ מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם who cries out to Abraham should be understood as a distinctive feature of the J material.⁷⁴ Moreover, the reference to Beersheba also occurs in chapter 21 verses 30-32 and is strongly emphasized in verse 34 indicating that this characteristic should also be associated to J and not to E.⁷⁵ Van Seters also notes that the introductory formula “after these things” וְאַחֲרָיִךְ (22: 20) which also occurs in chapter 15 is a chapter normally categorized as belonging to the Yahwist.⁷⁶

⁶⁸ Speiser, *Genesis*, xxvii.

⁶⁹ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 229.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Speiser, *Genesis*, xxvii.

⁷² Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 230.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

There is also the statement in verse 2 “upon one of the mountains which I will designate to you” *עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֶמַר אֵלֶיךָ* and which is repeated in verse 3 “he went to the place which God designated to him” *וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אָמַר־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים*.⁷⁷ Taking all these factors into consideration suggests that the author of Genesis 22: 1-14, 19 should not be identified as the hand of E but J. Van Seters notes that the real difficulty lies in the relationship of verses 15-18 to the rest of the narrative. Westermann notes that verses 15-18 are an addition, as they have no function in the actual framework of the narrative, which is driven by the theme of “testing”.⁷⁸ Van Seters explains that the device of having the angel appear for a second time looks like a convenient way of making an addition to the story and it has been widely interpreted in this manner by many scholars.⁷⁹ However Van Seters argues that the content of this particular passage (15-18) is very similar to that of many so-called J passages emphasizing the blessing of the patriarch.⁸⁰ Hence the themes present in verses 15-18 are those characteristic of J as well.

Analysis of Genesis 22

In Genesis chapter 21 the promise of progeny has been concluded and the sons of Abraham (Isaac and Ishmael) are en route towards their respective destinies. Chapter 22 disrupts the flow of the narrative sequence and threatens the promise of progeny with God’s command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.⁸¹ According to

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, 354.

⁷⁹ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 230.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis, Readings, a New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 98.

L.A. Turner this command must rank as the least comprehensible in a series of divine amendments to the progeny promise.⁸² He moves on to explain that the reader has come to expect Abraham's strong resistance after having read the previous accounts in the Abraham cycles. In Genesis 17: 18 after Abraham pleads with God on behalf of Ishmael when the young boy is eliminated from the covenantal promise and in Genesis 18: 22-23 Abraham argues face to face with God over Sodom in order to preserve Lot.⁸³ Thus, it is surprising that here in Genesis 22 where such a command would extinguish the entire course that was started in chapter 12 (the promise of progeny) that the reader is presented with Abraham accepting and obeying unquestionably God's revision of his plans.⁸⁴ The focus of the narrative in Genesis 22 seems to emphasize Abraham's unquestioning faith a theme already encountered in previous chapters and according to Turner reintroduced in chapter 22 in order to indicate to the reader that now the story has come full circle and will soon come to an end.⁸⁵ Most scholars agree that the language utilized by the author of Genesis 22 presents Abraham's actions in minute detail in order to convey the poignancy of the act.⁸⁶ "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love" וְיִאמָר קַח-נָא אֶת-בְּנֶךָ (22: 2). R. Alter describes the phrase as being "exquisitely forged to carry a dramatic burden".⁸⁷ Alter also indicates that the phrase has caused several problems for exegetes; the statement "your only son" (אֶת-יְחִידְךָ) has been particularly troublesome because the statement is inaccurate for Abraham had two sons Ishmael and Isaac.⁸⁸ Alter points out that some scholars have interpreted the statement to mean "favoured one" (אֶת-יְחִידְךָ) but he continues by making note that this

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Robert Alter, *Genesis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 103.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

interpretation misses the point in respect to Abraham's feelings for Isaac as his sole son by his legitimate wife, hence his only one.⁸⁹ A point stressed here by the author of the narrative who wishes to legitimate Isaac as one of the true patriarchs in the sequence of lineage of Israel's history.⁹⁰

There are also indications throughout the narrative that lead the reader to assume that Abraham believed his son would be spared much like Ishmael was in the previous chapter.⁹¹ Turner begins by indicating that first the reader is told that "Abraham rose early in the morning" וַיִּשְׁכֶם אַבְרָהָם בֶּבֶקֶר (22: 3) a phrase which is reminiscent of when Abraham had to dispose of his other son in the previous chapter (21: 14).⁹² The phrase is meant to be unsettling and it is introduced here to remind the reader that once again the life of a son is at risk but also raises the possibility that if Ishmael had been saved from death perhaps Isaac will also.⁹³ Turner believes that the most telling sign of Abraham's belief that Isaac will most likely be spared is when Abraham tells his young servants that he and Isaac will return to them after they have worshipped וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנִשְׁכָּרָה אֲלֵיכֶם (22: 5).⁹⁴ Similarly Isaac's question regarding the whereabouts of the sacrificial lamb וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ וְהָעֵצִים וְאַיִה הַשָּׂה לֵעָלֶה (22: 7) makes explicit the fact that Isaac does not know what Abraham knows.⁹⁵ Furthermore, Abraham's response to Isaac that God will provide a lamb for the sacrifice וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֱמָר (22: 7), while possibly being only deception, also suggests that Abraham knows something that the reader does not.⁹⁶

The journey to the place of worship is described as taking three days and has been compressed by the author into verses 1-8 while the preparations for the sacrifice

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Turner, *Genesis*, 98.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 99.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

itself is minutely detailed in verses 9-10. According to Turner the normal sequence was to bind and kill the sacrifice before placing it on the altar but here the reader is presented with Isaac lying bound upon the altar still alive (וַיִּשָּׁק ד' אֶת-יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּשָּׂם).⁹⁷ Turner explains the unusual action as an attempt to postpone the sacrifice as long as possible.⁹⁸ Finally Abraham raises his knife וַיִּשְׁלַח (22: 10) and then suddenly “the angel of the Lord” appears וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מֵלֶאךָ יְהוָה מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם (22: 11a) and the readers can guess what he will say before he even opens his mouth.⁹⁹

At the beginning of the narrative the reader is told that Abraham will be tested וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת-אַבְרָהָם (22: 1) and it would seem from the sequence of the narrative that the test was whether or not Abraham will indeed kill Isaac.¹⁰⁰ According to C. Westermann the statement that “God is testing Abraham” was intended to color the whole narrative.¹⁰¹ He moves on to explain the process of *testing* first involves a task being presented; then the task must be carried out and thus one finds out whether the *test* has been passed or not.¹⁰² He then explains that in the first part (vv. 1b-2) a task is laid on the one being *tested*; in the second part (vv. 3-10) Abraham carries it out but only as far as the penultimate act; in the third part the structure of the *test* is modified in that the last act is taken out of Abraham’s hands.¹⁰³ Hence the command to kill, implied in the command to sacrifice, has been revoked (vv. 11-12a) and Abraham is told that he has passed the *test* (v. 12b).¹⁰⁴ Westermann points out that the structure of the narrative is presenting the reader with a *test* scenario and should not be misunderstood as dealing with the issue of child sacrifice; at every stage and with

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, 354.

¹⁰² Ibid., 355.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

every sentence the narrator has his goal in view: to tell the story about the *testing* of Abraham.¹⁰⁵ Hence the argument that the narrative represents a protest against human sacrifice and the introduction of animal substitution is misguided. It seems more likely that the narrative in its final form is not an attempt to contest existing practices but rather the product of a religious attitude associated to the "patriarchal" God with respect to human sacrifice.¹⁰⁶

Westermann also notes that the statement of theme at the beginning of the narrative determines it as a theological narrative.¹⁰⁷ He then moves on to explicate that if the putting to the *test* of an individual by God presupposes the *testing* of the people, then the statement of theme points to the theological questioning and concern of a time when the "fear of God" of the individual was acquiring a greater significance for this people.¹⁰⁸ Westermann then concludes that the author of the narrative was writing in a later period and this later period, as mentioned earlier, should be identified as the period of the monarchy.¹⁰⁹ Westermann identifies the patriarchal narratives as being concerned with the pre-historical, pre-political and pre-cultic existence. All is set within the life-style of the small-cattle nomads who are on the move encountering constant danger and are without economic or political security.¹¹⁰ According to Westermann the conflicts in the Abraham narratives are for the most part of a familiar kind. Family conflict gives rise to the power struggle where the concern is private interest, gain and possession.¹¹¹ Westermann argues that J's theological base is that blessing and peace belong together, he then moves on to explain that this theological understanding is clearly expressed in the promise of a king of peace in the later period

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 356.

of Israel.¹¹² The patriarchal narratives continued to live on in such a way that in the process of narration, contemporary theological questioning were opened up.¹¹³ So it is likely that behind this later interpretation there lay an older narrative, which told how Abraham's son (destined to be sacrificed) was in mortal danger and was rescued from it.¹¹⁴ The action narrated here takes place among God, a father and his son; which places the narrative within the family circle.¹¹⁵ Westermann also points out that the God of Abraham is the God who blesses and saves the nations. There emerges one characteristic, which links the patriarchal stories with the later religion of Israel: God intervenes in a special way for the weak, the disadvantaged, and the outcast.¹¹⁶ Westermann understands the narrative as presenting one God who deals with and speaks to Abraham. It is one God whom he invokes and in whom he trusts. For Westermann it is this presupposition alone that renders J's overall plan possible: J presents the history of the people as a coherent story in these stages from the patriarchs, through Moses and the wandering in the desert, up to the settlement of the people.¹¹⁷ Van Seters agrees with Westermann that the narrative does indeed reflect the theological concerns of a later period but that this later period, as mentioned earlier, should be understood as the exilic period and not the monarchical period.

Part of the problem with the literary analysis of this narrative has to do with whether or not there was a pre-literary *Vorlage* to it.¹¹⁸ According to Van Seters much of the decision about form is based upon an evaluation of verse 14 and its relationship to the rest of the narrative.¹¹⁹ The text states: "So Abraham called the name of that place, 'Yahweh Sees/Provides' as it is said today, 'on the mountain Yahweh

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 355.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 356.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 231.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

appears/provides” שם-המקום ההוא יהיה יראָה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הַיּוֹם בְּהַר יְהוָה יִרְאָה וַיִּקְרָא אֶסְרֵהֶם (Gen 22: 14). According to Westermann the narrative reaches its goal with the naming of the mountain. The name given to the mountain is in reference to Abraham’s reaction.¹²⁰ The drama begins with God and finds its resolution in God. One does not grasp the meaning if one sees the goal merely in the words of the angel: “now I know that you are a God-fearing man” עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־יִרְאֵה אֵל־הַיִּם אַתָּה it would be a one-sided understanding to refer the verse, “God tested Abraham,” וַיִּבְחָלֵה הַיִּם נֶסָה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם to the result of the test.¹²¹ Rather the test as a whole should be understood as a father’s path of suffering and this ends only when the substitute victim has been offered and the mountain is named.¹²²

Despite the difficulties and ambiguities in the meaning of the verse the form is fairly clear, it contains elements that reflect an etymological aetiology. Normally there are two basic types of such aetiologies. Van Seters explains that the two different types can be categorized as those involving the naming of a child and those involving the explanation of a place name.¹²³ The first type consists of the following elements: a narrated event or report, the act of naming by a principle figure in the story using the regular narrative past tense and the etymological explanation is introduced by a *kî*-clause with the verb also in the narrative past tense.¹²⁴ The second type consists of: recounting an event that takes place in a specific location and then of drawing an inference from the event to the meaning of the name of the place.¹²⁵ The basic “mark” of this second form is the concluding statement, “therefore its name is called...” or

¹²⁰ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, 356.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 231.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

often modified to fit the time of the narrator, "To this day..."¹²⁶ According to Van Seters the narrative seems to correspond much more to the second type than it does the first, since it begins by placing considerable emphasis on the location of the place and the particular event that happened there.¹²⁷ However, Van Seters notes that despite this first glance illusion verse 14a can be clearly identified as fitting into the first type.¹²⁸ He explains that the name is not a real name at all but a purely fictitious one, which is probably the reason for the shift to the narrative past.¹²⁹ By doing so Van Seters notes that there is no need for the place to be identifiable. On the other hand, Van Seters suggests that in 14b instead of an explanation introduced by *kî* and referring back to the historic past as in the first part of the verse, there is a shift to the passive imperfect "as it is said" אָשַׁר יֵאָמַר and the insertion of a temporal modifier "today," הַיּוֹם which now moves to the time of the narrator so that 14b is made to fit second type of aetiology.¹³⁰ Van Seters explains that the focus is not on the name of the place but on the nature of the event, which has now become recurrent and timeless.¹³¹ Furthermore, it has nothing to do with the institution of a cultic act but speaks only of the divine response.¹³²

Kilian argues that because the narrative is dealing with a cult aetiology, which intended to explain the origin of a certain cult practice of substitutionary animal sacrifice the written source should be identified as E.¹³³ He suggests that the narrative at one time was intended to provide an answer to the question as to why it is that one

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 115.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 232.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Rudolf Kilian, *Literarkritische Und Formgeschichtliche Untersuchung Des Heiligkeitgesetzes*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge. Bd. 19 (Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1963). Because R. Kilian's book is only available in German I have opted to rely on Van Seters' assessment in *Abraham in History and Tradition*, in respect to Kilian's argument on aetiologies. (p.233).

offers an animal sacrifice as opposed to a child sacrifice at the holy place as it was customary to do so in earlier times.¹³⁴ According to Kilian this is no longer the case because the original introduction has been lost and substituted by the later writer's introduction.¹³⁵ Van Seters points out that Kilian's argument concerning the etiological question seems to be based primarily on the nature of the episode. Van Seters asks whether this etiological questioning is really necessary? Van Seters continues by stating that the ability to formulate an etiological question that a story might answer does not mean that such a story actually came into being as an answer to one's question.¹³⁶ He concludes that the great popularity of this motif of the hero who is forced to sacrifice his own son or daughter (usually already an adolescent) may account for the origin of this theme more readily than aetiology.¹³⁷

For Van Seters the etiological formula introduced in verse 14 is a form, which needs to be understood at the literary level because it is only at this level that such etiological elements develop the primary function of subtle word play rather than explanation.¹³⁸ Many scholars such as Kilian and Westermann, begin with the presupposition that there was an oral form of the story that the later writer took up and modified for his own purpose. Hence Van Seters explains that based on this supposition that whatever belongs to the final writer's theme and perspective must be eliminated and in this way the *Vorlage* itself will become apparent.¹³⁹ Both scholars believe that verses 1a and 12b are the work of a later writer but beyond this the two reconstructions of the so-called "original" are entirely different. According to Van

¹³⁴ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 233.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 235.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 237.

Seters these contradictory results should be the clearest indication that this method is faulty and unreliable.¹⁴⁰

Van Seters concludes that the only story we have is the written one. Hence whatever "sources" were used such as popular folklore motifs, etiological models or the like, there is every indication that the writer exercised considerable freedom in the use of them so that the present account is in every meaningful sense his own.¹⁴¹ He moves on to state that there is no form of "control" from inside or outside of the narrative, there is no way of disputing their claims or any number of other possibilities that may arise in the future because there is no concrete way of moving "behind" this level of the tradition to any other "historical" or "sociological" reality.¹⁴²

Collective Memory

From what has been gathered thus far it is clear that the purpose and intent of the narrative was not to reconstruct historically events of the past as they occurred but rather to establish the "identity" of what it meant to be an Israelite during the author's time. P. Davies suggests that the narratives found in the Old Testament are forms of 'collective recollection,' which aid in understanding the character and intention of what is known as 'biblical history'.¹⁴³ Davies moves on to explain that this so-called 'biblical history' is not an assertion that the events narrated in the Old Testament actually took place, on the contrary these stories are more a testimony of what the people of Israel are to remember.¹⁴⁴ Previously, M. Halbwachs had described that both the function of remembering and determining the identity of the collective are crucial

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Davies, "The History of Ancient Israel and Judah," 19.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

to 'cultural identity'.¹⁴⁵ According to Halbwachs the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present.¹⁴⁶ 'Cultural memory' is selective and creative in reconstructing an image of the past, which is usually in accord with the prevalent thoughts of the society.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, J. Assmann, explains that while reconstructing the identity of the collective the 'cultural memory' will incorporate a 'reference to the past' but this 'reference' does not imply a direct link with a past event.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, the memories of the collective and their relation to their 'past' history provides the collective with the dynamism that enables them to form their 'future' history.¹⁴⁹ Hence it is not what happened to us that defines us but what we remember about the events. One can conclude that the past is therefore, a vital element for the formation of the identity of the people of Israel.

Hence the only real alternative is to approach the story as a literary construction and to analyze it from this perspective. According to Van Seters every element in the story is consciously and carefully taken up and used for a specific purpose or effect.¹⁵⁰ Van Seters points out that there are three themes that have been completely interrelated, these are: the testing of God, which moves from command (vv. 1-2) to obedience (vv. 3, 9-12), the testing that calls forth the faith of Abraham in the providence of God (vv. 1, 6-8), which in turn is answered by the act of God's providence (vv. 13-14) and his promise of blessings (vv. 15-18), and the sacred place that is the place of Abraham's obedience and of God's provision (vv. 2-5, 9, 14).¹⁵¹ Van Seters then moves on to discuss each of these themes and explains that the first

¹⁴⁵ Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 38.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Jan Assmann and Rodney Livingstone, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, Religion Und Kulturelles Gedächtnis. English (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 11.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 238.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

theme provides the broad framework for the whole story even though it does not account for all its parts; the second theme provides the act of testing with a sense of subjectivity; the third theme gives the general location of the main events in the initial command (to go) וּלְךָ-לֵךְ and the naming in the final statement of the drama (v.14) it provides the story with a connection to the model of a place aetiology.¹⁵² Van Seters also notes the “unusual features” associated to the place theme, first the two names given to the one location “land of Moriah” אֶל-אֶרֶץ מֹרְיָה and “Yahweh Sees/Provides” יְהוָה יִרְאֶה are not actual names but as mentioned earlier are fictitious creations.¹⁵³ The meaning associated to the second name is somewhat clear but the first name, according to Van Seters, must mean something like “land of the *fear* of Yahweh” (mora’ + yh).¹⁵⁴ The place by the first name is tied to the theme of Abraham’s obedience and the second name stresses the theme of divine providence.¹⁵⁵ Van Seters argues that the unifying marker of the place theme is the constant reiteration of the statement that this is “the place which God said to him” (vv. 2, 3, 9), the statement is also clearly indicating that the location is the divine election of a cult place just as in Genesis 26: 2 (also attributed to J) on a larger scale it signifies the divine choice of Palestine as the “promise land”.¹⁵⁶ Hence the author of Genesis 22 is purposefully choosing symbolic names in order to demythologize the concept of the sacred place otherwise as Van Seters notes why not have simply stated that the place in question was Jerusalem?¹⁵⁷ Van Seters argues that this radical break by means of the Abraham tradition, allows the author to convey the message that the holy place is

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. In Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. The Hebrew term מֹרְאָה is defined as the “the fear of or terror of” but in the sense of reverence where by God is most often the object, p.432.

¹⁵⁵ Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 238.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

the place of the fear of God (v.2), the place where one goes to pray (v. 5), the place where the providence of God is seen (v. 14).¹⁵⁸

The providence of God is a concern in a number of the J stories. In chapter 21:8ff God heard the cries of Hagar and those of the young boy and he provided the well for their thirst and in chapter 22 God looked out for Abraham and Isaac and provided the ram.¹⁵⁹ More importantly Van Seters notes that in chapter 21 Ishmael is given the providential promise of becoming a nation, this promise is related in a single speech by the angel from heaven.¹⁶⁰ In chapter 22, the providential promise is also present, however, they are numerous in number and according to Van Seters would have made the first "angelic" speech to long hence the author presents the reader with a second speech by the angel which seems to be more of an appendix than anything else.¹⁶¹ At this point, Van Seters argues that the theological concern has become more important than the story structure itself.¹⁶² He moves on to state, a position also held by Westermann, that it is the theme of "testing" and of the obedience response to the "testing" that is the most basic to the whole story structure in its final form.¹⁶³ The ultimate aim of the "testing" only becomes clear with the inclusion of verses 15-18 where we have the second speech relating the divine confirmation of the patriarchal promise otherwise nothing would be changed and the whole purpose of the "testing" would have had no real consequence.¹⁶⁴ Hence because of Abraham's obedience his children will be blessed. The aetiology here in Genesis 22 should be understood as a literary device construed by the Yahwist himself and is not an addition by a later hand

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 239.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

as is frequently suggested.¹⁶⁵ All the folkloric motifs incorporated in the story of Genesis 22 should be understood as expressions and insertion by the J author.

Van Seters' position is also followed by R. Albertz who like Van Seters explains that the authors of the exilic period attempted to find a new basis for the community's relationship to God since it was quite evident after the events of 587 B.C.E. that salvation history would no longer be the grounds for establishing a relationship of trust between God and his people.¹⁶⁶ The solution proposed by the exilic authors is what Albertz describes as the 'primal relationship,' which he moves on to define as a relationship of trust between the Creator and his creatures.¹⁶⁷ This relationship is one conceived within the confines of the family piety; family liturgy was the key ingredient taken up by the exilic writers and introduced into the main cult.¹⁶⁸

Another theme introduced by the writers of the exilic period is God's involvement within the history of mankind. Albertz describes how God's actions are unknowable to us hence we should not attempt to understand the reasons for the doings and not doings of the Almighty.¹⁶⁹ This environment of crisis and transition has generated a great deal of doubt within the community of the exilic period leading the author to produce narratives which disclaims all of these doubts and calls forth the community to put their faith in the all-powerful Creator.¹⁷⁰ The aim of the narrative is to persuade the community that the relationship between God and the elect community is still very much present and that it is this relation of Creator and creature that the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 240.

¹⁶⁶ Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, Religionsgeschichte Israels in Alttestamentlicher Zeit. English (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 401.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 402.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

community must not forget, for it is faith in the Creator which will allow the community to persevere and be guide towards a more positive future.

For both Albertz and Van Seters the key theme is the patriarchal blessings, which were obviously of great importance in respect to the historical ownership of the land of Israel. One might then ask who would be most interested in transmitting these patriarchal blessings and why? According to Albertz the patriarchs were not just individuals but were always represented as tribal ancestors of Israel and the divine promises transferred onto them always applied to Israel as a whole.¹⁷¹ He moves on to explain that because these divine promises were not dependent on any merits of the patriarchs, they could not be corrupted, no matter how badly Israel behaved.¹⁷² Albertz concludes that unlike the largely conditional Deuteronomic promises, which were annulled by Israel's sin, the patriarchal promises offered a positive point on which a national future hope could be fixed in the exilic period.¹⁷³ Therefore, one can conclude that through the patriarchal blessings the authors of the exilic period found a way to overcome the theological crisis of their times. Van Seters describes the patriarchal blessing as an expression of national destiny, which deals with the future wish of prosperity and fertility.¹⁷⁴ According to Albertz, as a result of the loss of its state organization, during the exilic period, Israel had largely been reduced to a family basis; the patriarchal traditions which had been constructed within a genealogical framework had sketched out the early history of Israel as a family history which allowed the Judahite families of the time of the exile who had become stateless to rediscover and identify themselves with the patriarchs and their families.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 405.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis*, 288.

¹⁷⁵ Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, 405.

Redactional Setting

Both Albertz and Van Seters thus far have depicted the narratives written by the Yahwist as being motivated by the political situation of the exile in order to reconnect the stateless Israelite families with their historical identity, one which originated with the patriarchal families. Although Albertz suggests that the motifs used by the Yahwist were the direct influence and consequence of the exilic period he also proposes in his later work that these motifs only became concrete literary realities in the Persian period. The Yahwist should be understood as a "movement," one which begins within the monarchic period and evolved throughout the exilic and Persian periods.¹⁷⁶ This "Yahwistic movement" was responsible for both the re-editing of certain existing narratives as well as the formation of new ones.¹⁷⁷ Hence in Albertz's later scholarly work the exilic period is depicted as mainly a transitory period, which permitted the Yahwistic movement to reflect upon the existing tradition before the final formation of the Yahwistic narratives in the Persian period.¹⁷⁸

B. Becking also suggests a Persian period redaction for the Yahwist when he states that it is "under Persian rule when Israel was in need of a reformulated identity".¹⁷⁹ Becking moves on to explain that it is the Exile and the Return to the land that caused "radical changes" which were developed under Persian rule, as the identity of the people became a necessity in order to cope with the reality of their political situation.¹⁸⁰ As a consequence to their political situation the worship of Yahweh as a

¹⁷⁶ Rainer Albertz and Bob Becking, "Problems and Possibilities: Perspectives on Postexilic Yahwism," in *Yahwism after the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era, Studies in Theology and Religion* (Assen, The Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2003), xii-xiii.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Bob Becking, "Law as Expression of Religion (Ezra 7-10)," in *Yahwism after the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era, Studies in Theology and Religion* (Assen, The Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2003), 18.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

“symbol” of identity no longer was a matter of tradition but of choice.¹⁸¹ The changed social, political and psychological circumstances provoked a “religious revolution,” which was filtered through the Old Testament narratives as means of substantiating their national and religious identity.¹⁸² E. Ben Zvi notes that the concept of exile provided a form of “self-definition for the community, that is, it constructed Israel in theological terms, as an ethnic, unified group with a particular past and where life was centered on divine teachings upon which the community’s fate depended”.¹⁸³

In light of Van Seters’ and Albertz’s positions in respect to authorship and dating of the narrative the ethical concerns imposed upon Genesis 22 by modern scholars cannot be upheld. Human sacrifice is not the primary concern of the narrative and is utilized by the author as a secondary motif. As stated earlier by Westermann, the theological concern of the narrative is solely in respect to Abraham’s obedience and unquestionable faith in his God. Here I wish to reiterate M. Smith’s position in respect to authorship of the Old Testament narratives, namely that these narratives clearly do not reflect events of an actual historical past but rather are motivated by the environment of the authors involved in preserving a particular tradition.¹⁸⁴ Smith also maintains that the Old Testament is not the literature of single party but the literature of a large number and long succession of parties whose purpose was to establish and fortify the worship of Yahweh as a primary and essential element of the people’s identity as the children of Israel.¹⁸⁵

The Yahwist must be viewed in the light of the history of Israel’s sacred traditions of election. From what has been presented it is clear that the tradition of

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ehud Ben Zvi, “What Is New in Yehud? Some Considerations,” in *Yahwism after the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era, Studies in Theology and Religion* (Assen, The Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2003), 36.

¹⁸⁴ Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old Testament*, Lectures on the History of Religions, New Ser., No. 9 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 9.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 12-15.

Abraham as a means of communal identity for Israel only came into play after the monarchic period and most probably during or after the exile. It is to the despairing community of the exile that the unbreakable promises of the patriarchs are addressed and Abraham becomes the focus of communal identity and the lifeline of their hope and destiny. On the basis of a literary analysis of Genesis 22 one can conclude that the literary source normally labelled, as the Yahwist should not be understood as a compiler of an ancient tradition. Rather the materials that the Yahwist received in a written form he rearranged and supplemented to express his own concerns. While at the same time creating stories and episodes in order to complement the already existing material in order to express the historical concerns and attitudes of his time.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to identify the role played by the theme of human sacrifice within the narrative of Genesis 22: 1-19 in order to better understand the intent of the author. In the introduction of this thesis I raised several questions seeking to find out the reasons for utilizing the act of cultic human sacrifice as the foreground for the narrative of Genesis 22: 1-19. This study has examined the topic of human sacrifice by analysing the archaeological and literary findings uncovered in both Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia. It has also investigated the possibility of human sacrifice as a literary construct meant to communicate something other than actual reality.

As I observed in chapter one, my goal was slightly different from the general trend underlying the scholarship in respect to human sacrifice and its relation to the early Israelite community. Mainstream scholarship has too often assumed that human sacrifice was an accepted and established practice found within the region of Syria-Palestine, as well as in most of the neighbouring communities, and as a result had filtered its way into the cultic practices of the early Israelite community of the “patriarchal” period. However as the archaeological and literary evidence has demonstrated no such practice can be concretely proven to have existed or practiced during the Middle Bronze Age II Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamian regions. My concern with the practice of human sacrifice was that if it was not an accepted and established rite performed by the early Israelite community of the “patriarchal” period, then why depict such an act within the history of the “patriarchal” fathers? As was presented in the first chapter some scholars have chosen to interpret the narrative as presenting the reader with the introduction of the abolition of human sacrifice in order

to explain the rite's presence within the narrative. I on the other hand have opted to present the rite of human sacrifice as a possible symbolic code.

My strategy was to demonstrate that sacrifice/offering was indeed an accepted and established aspect of Israelite cultic performance. In chapter two, I presented an overview of the cultic practice as depicted within the book of Leviticus as well as in other parts of the Old Testament. Since the actual act of human sacrifice was not one found within the priestly narratives I then proceeded to present a review of the Anthropological approaches to the cultic act of sacrifice and more precisely to the act of human sacrifice. As a result I discovered that the discussions offered by the various anthropologists on the topic of human sacrifice presented the ritual act of sacrifice as something which should be understood symbolically. Not only was sacrifice to be understood as a symbolic system but one which was expressed in metaphor.¹ Thus it seemed only appropriate to examine the notion of metaphor and its use as a literary construct. The assessment of symbolic meaning expressed through the use of metaphor has demonstrated that Ancient Israelites conceived of sacrifice not as a solution to the problem of transgression but rather as a positive expression of their religious ideals and hopes.

My analysis of the topic of human sacrifice has now demonstrated that the author of Genesis 22 did not use the cultic act as a literal representation of early Israelite practice but rather as means of expressing a symbolic code. The next logical step was to uncover the intent of this particular symbolic code. Here in chapter three, I chose to begin by examining the scholarly arguments against placing the narrative of Genesis 22 in a presumed "patriarchal" period. My aim was to demonstrate that the narrative of Genesis 22 was bourn out of a much later period in Israelite history. Once

¹ Leach, *Culture & Communication : The Logic by Which Symbols Are Connected: An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology*, 83-84.

the date of composition had been established as not being that of a “patriarchal” period I then proceeded to review the different theories dealing with the literary composition of the Pentateuch and more precisely with the book of Genesis. This review highlighted the various positions held by scholars in regards to the Yahwist’s possible historical setting.

The investigation of the author’s historical setting has demonstrated that the narratives written by the Yahwist were motivated by the sociological and political realities of the Babylonian Exile. As is demonstrated in chapter three the analysis of the author’s purpose, has also established that the aim of the narrative was not to historically reconstruct events of the past but to reformulate the “identity” of the community in response to the Exile. M Halbwachs’ and J. Assman’s theory of “Cultural Memory” and “Collective Remembering” clarify this particular aspect of collective identity.² Halbwachs and Assmann explain that the past is not maintained but rather is reconstructed in light of the present.³ Hence the history that one “creates,” a creation which may or may not incorporate actual events, provides the dynamism needed to shape the identity of the collective in the future.⁴ Through the study of this particular theory on collective memory it is possible to suggest that the author’s intent was to create a specific group identity in response to the realities of the Exile. Hence the identity needed to be firmly linked to the past, a past that was represented by a righteous and God-fearing individual. The individual also needed to be easily recognizable as a “hero” of the past and who through his endeavours gained God’s favour. These elements were essential in creating a group identity that would allow the

² The theory of “Cultural Memory” and “Collective Remembering” are discussed in Halbwachs and Coser, *On Collective Memory*, 38, Assmann and Livingstone, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, 6-7.

³ Halbwachs and Coser, *On Collective Memory*, 40. Assmann and Livingstone, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, 11.

⁴ Assmann and Livingstone, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, 11.

isolated exiled community to create a sense of stability and to bond together in light of their social reality.⁵

Chapter three also examined the evolution of the Yahwistic composition. Scholars such as R. Albertz have demonstrated that although the Babylonian Exile is indeed the point of departure for understanding the author's historical setting, the Yahwistic redaction should be viewed as a composition in constant motion, for only then can one understand the creative process behind the Yahwistic narratives.⁶ As was demonstrated in this study the Exile provided the foreground for thinking of Israel's collective identity in a new manner one which would enable the stateless community to reconnect with its historical identity as a chosen people. This transitory period was followed by subsequent foreign rule, which further stressed the necessity for a reformulated identity and allowed the Yahwistic movement to take this new collective identity to the literary stage. Scholarly arguments have demonstrated that Persian foreign rule provided the Israelite community with a great deal of freedom that generated the ideal condition for the composition of the patriarchal narratives.⁷

What I have argued is that the elements found in the narrative of Genesis 22: 1-19 initially seems to suggest that the story is about human sacrifice or rather the abolition of the rite, in reality, however, the narrative is attempting to convey the idea that human suffering does not need to be appeased by offering one's dearest possessions to God. Despite the situation of hardship and affliction one may find oneself in, God will not demand that you sacrifice all that is precious to you. Rather, one's righteous behaviour and demonstration of one's faith in God are sufficient acts of piety to ensure God's favour. Surely this was the message which a people in exile needed to hear. A people who had witnessed the devastation of Jerusalem, a people

⁵ Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, 403-05.

⁶ Albertz and Becking, "Problems and Possibilities: Perspectives on Postexilic Yahwism," xiii.

⁷ Becking, "Law as Expression of Religion (Ezra 7-10)," 19.

who had literally sacrificed loved ones to the Babylonians, were now informed that such sacrifices were no longer demanded and what was needed instead was complete faith in Yahweh.

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