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## THE SYMBOLISM OF BLOOD AND SACRIFICE

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**B**LOOD rites are so common that the student of religion must ask about their meaning. Is there a basic, common meaning, or are there several not reducible to a single one? One common answer is to attribute a special power to blood: It is a "divine sanguinary substance" which revivifies the divinity and so gives force to rites.<sup>1</sup> But that blood rites are widespread is not enough to justify such a claim. Blood impresses the imagination. Its loss means weakness and death. It can, therefore, easily be identified with strength. But blood also arouses fear and repulsion. It can be a sign of illness and death. Just what motive accounts for its presence in rites must be matter for careful study of the individual cases.

Since Wellhausen and W. Robertson Smith a prime base for the claim that blood is divine and so is used in ritual has been the assertion that the ancient Semitic world generally held that "in the blood is life," or at least that this was characteristic of the West Semites.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this paper is to study the extrabiblical evidence to see whether it confirms the doctrine of Gen 9 4, Lev 17 11, and Deut 12 23. This means careful study of what is largely indirect evidence. We have descriptions of or allusions to the rites, not explanations of their meaning.

Turning to the evidence, we might expect that the ancient cultural leader, Mesopotamia, would attribute a divine character to blood, for blood, or at least human blood, was from the gods. They had created man by vivifying clay with the blood of a god slain for rebellion,<sup>3</sup> but no conclusions for the cult seem to have been drawn from this. The Mesopotamian sacrifice was essentially a meal served to the gods, a ritual undoubtedly influenced by the Sumerians, who, as far as we

<sup>1</sup> E. g., E. O. James, *Sacrifice and Sacrament*, pp. 27, 60-61, 136. One main source for the idea is B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen (*The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, p. 206), noting that blood "drives out" the spirits of game from their hiding places and so increases the available supply. But "drive out" does not seem to imply "impart power" so much as frighten or the like. We shall probably never know the exact force of that "drive out," but it is an admonition to care in using our sources.

<sup>2</sup> A. L. Oppenheim (*Ancient Mesopotamia*, p. 192) avoids the earlier generalization, but speaks of "... the 'blood consciousness' of the West..."

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *enuma eliš* VI, 5-34; *KAR* 4, 26.

know, did not associate blood with the clay of creation.<sup>4</sup> To argue that this extrinsic influence changed the basic character of ritual among the Mesopotamian Semites does not seem possible. This might account for the concept of the sacrifice as banquet, but it leaves unexplained the unimportance of blood in their numerous purificatory and dedicatory rituals. This contrasts sharply with Hebrew practice, where blood was the universal purifier and consecrator. If this stems from a primitive Semitic belief in the divine nature of blood, an idea not unknown in Mesopotamia, it is difficult to understand how the Akkadians and their Semitic successors could have stopped using so powerful a substance for ritual, if they had originally so done.

Of course, since Akkadian *naqû* ("pour") is the ordinary word for "offer sacrifice," it is argued that the pouring out of a victim's blood was so central as to denominate the whole sacrificial process. However, there is no positive evidence for the ritual manipulation of blood, drink offering was an important element in the banquet offering, and the act of libation was certainly designated by *naqû*. Given the overriding conception of sacrifice as a meal, surely it is most likely that the drink offering, not an unattested use of blood, gave the name to the whole ritual.<sup>5</sup>

Hittite civilization offers an instructive parallel. Since the verb *šipand-* ("pour") also designated sacrificing, some conclude that blood had a central rôle in sacrifice. Once again, the texts are remarkably reticent about the use of blood. To establish its rôle one must fall back on interpreting ritual scenes on the monuments which do depict libations, but not necessarily of blood.<sup>6</sup> In fact, as in Mesopotamia, the concept of sacrifice was that of offering the gods needed food and drink.<sup>7</sup>

The same is true in the other great center of early civilization in the eastern Mediterranean basin. Egyptian religion was not one where the blood of sacrifice played a significant rôle. Once more, the offerings

<sup>4</sup> So generally; references in Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 182-98, and R. Schmid, *Das Bundesopfer in Israel*, pp. 51-54. For the Sumerians, see S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians*, p. 150.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of *naqû* use E. Dhorme, *Les religions de Babylonie et d'Assyrie*, pp. 224-25, 252. The prevalence of the word is all the more significant in that *ziqû* (Heb. *zkh*) implying bloody offerings was in the language from Amorite times (cf. Codex Hammurabi iv, 22) but never prevailed as the ritual word.

<sup>6</sup> For blood in Hittite ritual see A. Goetze, *Kleinasien*<sup>2</sup>, p. 164, and R. Dussaud, *Les religions des Hittites et des Hourrites, des Phéniciens, et des Syriens*, pp. 428-29, which depends upon the work of G. Furlani; but Furlani himself ("La religione degli Hittiti," in G. Castellani, ed., *Storia delle religioni* 1<sup>5</sup>, Turin, 1962, pp. 460-61) is careful to avoid mention of blood, which, of course, cannot be shown to be the substance of the libations depicted.

<sup>7</sup> A. Goetze, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-64; H. Otten, "Das Hethiterreich," in H. Schmökel, *Kulturgeschichte des alten Orient*, pp. 428-29.

were essentially royal meals for the gods.<sup>8</sup> Man must maintain temples and festal meals to see to the care and feeding of the gods. The gods depended upon his offerings, but this support was not a "divine sanguinary substance"; it was simple food and drink. Thus the basic concept of sacrifice in the major centers of the more ancient civilizations, for all their diversity, is remarkably unitary. Sacrifice is offering food to the gods, and blood as such had no special, explicit part in it.

In fact, since Robertson Smith the parade example of the ritual use of blood among ancient Semites has been the religion of ancient central Arabia. We are told that the tribes of the region anointed the horns of their altars and poured out the blood of sacrifice in a special place connected with the altar. This sounds like familiar Israelite ritual, and that is the trouble. The information still seems to come from the Christian Nilus' report on the tribe which captured him, and Nilus was an unreliable reporter.<sup>9</sup> Even if he were reliable, his evidence comes from the sixth century of our era when Jewish (and Christian) ideas had thoroughly penetrated Arabia. It is hardly solid, independent testimony for primeval practice and belief.

There is another class of rites, purification and apotropaic rituals perhaps not strictly sacrificial, but certainly not sharply distinguished from religious rites by the ancients themselves, if they made any distinction at all. Hence such rituals may be sources of evidence for beliefs about blood.

Once again, our evidence is complex. In Mesopotamia propitiatory rites and the like were inextricably mixed up with magic. Without getting into a discussion of the relation of magic to religion we can ask whether these rites treated blood as somehow divine and so efficacious. The *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* gives no references to *dāmu* in incantation texts and the like. Furlani does refer to two apotropaic rites using blood.<sup>10</sup> It also appears in omen texts, but as a mere physical sign on a par with lines on the liver, not as having a special meaning in its own right. Considering the mass of propitiatory texts and the like which are preserved, this infrequent mention of blood as such surely indicates that it had little importance in ritual.

Red wool does play a part in some of the *šurpu* purificatory rites.

<sup>8</sup> References in Schmid, *Bundesopfer*, pp. 47-51.

<sup>9</sup> The latest treatment gives no other reference: see G. Ryckmans, "Les religions arabes préislamiques," in *Histoire général des religions* III, pp. 202-03, followed by de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, p. 16. On Nilus' unreliability see Gaster *IntDB*, 4, p. 151.

<sup>10</sup> See G. Furlani, *Il sacrificio nella religione dei Semiti di Babilonia e Assiria*, *Memoria della accademia dei lincei. Classe di scienze morali. . . VI/IV/III*. Rome, 1932, p. 352.

<sup>11</sup> E. Reiner, *Šurpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations*, *Beiheft 11, 1*, lines 14, 14', v-vi, lines 93-102, 113-22.

and this is assumed sometimes to be a surrogate for blood, indicating its power. However, the manipulation of red wool takes away curses, hexes, and the like, as well as bodily pain. It is aimed at evil in general and therefore is not even sympathetic magic for trouble associated with blood and so life symbolized by blood. The text does not specify blood, nor does it give red pride of place. A Hittite substitution rite adds to our knowledge of this kind of thing. To protect the king an animal substitute for him is adorned with flocks of varicolored wool. These symbolize diseases, and we might assume that the red signifies blood or blood-red spots or the like. Perhaps so, but it is on a level with green, black, and white. Red or blood has no special place or meaning in the Hittite ritual, nor, presumably, its Mesopotamian prototype.<sup>12</sup>

Still, it is sometimes said that there was a special purificatory power in blood because Akkadian *kuppuru*, like Hebrew *kāppēr*, means "purify with blood" on the basis of the Babylonian New Year ritual text, where a slaughtered sheep is used to purify the temple.<sup>13</sup> But line 354 says, "The incantation priest shall purify (*ukappar*) the temple with the corpse (*ina pagri*) of the sheep." The body, not the blood, purifies, and even it does not confer purity like the blood in Lev 16. Rather it absorbs impurities, becoming so contaminated that it and the men who handled it were cast out of the holy precincts, carrying away impurity.<sup>14</sup>

The typical purificatory rite in Mesopotamian practice was washing or rubbing with water or oil or milk or the like, not with blood as in Israel. In fact, the Hittite ritual of Papanikri is unusual in cuneiform literature because it uses blood to purify. Blood was smeared on a building contaminated by bloodshed, and the removal of the new blood took away the contamination of the old.<sup>15</sup> This is simple imitative magic. Blood is blood, and removing the new takes away the old. It is a specific for problems related to blood, not something specially and generally powerful in its own right.

Thus, to say the least, there is little concrete evidence that blood is purificatory. Where are the parallels to Lev 17 11: blood is life given by God and so it has purifying power? It is rash to extrapolate this

<sup>12</sup> Cf. H. M. Kümmel, *Ersatzrituale für den hethitischen König. Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten* 3. Wiesbaden, 1967, who demonstrates the Mesopotamian source of the ritual (cf. pp. 6, 112, 124, 188-98). M. Vieyra, "Rites de purification hittites," *RHR*, 119 (1939), pp. 141-42, points out that similar decoration of men or animals may be simply imitation of royal regalia.

<sup>13</sup> Kümmel, *ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>14</sup> Materially, this is like the removal of the remains of the sin offering, Lev 7 12, but the meaning is quite different. The remains are too pure to keep, the sheep and the men in Babylon too impure. This is very clear from the normal use of the Akkadian verb to mean "purify (by wiping) with bread or dough," i. e., substances which literally absorbed impurities.

<sup>15</sup> See F. Sommer and H. Eheloff, *Boğazköi-Studien*, 10, Leipzig, 1924.

isolated theory into an explanation on the meaning of blood in rite and sacrifice in the ancient Near Eastern world, let alone religion in general.

However, there is still more evidence to be examined. There was another view (or method) of sacrifice in the ancient world. The rituals of Canaan and Greece shared some remarkable practices. Both had holocausts which, whatever their exact meaning, represent a different conception from that of the divine banquet. The *thysia* and *šlmm* offerings with their peculiar allocation of parts of the victim to the god and the communal meal again show a different conception.<sup>16</sup> Doubtless burning the divine portion represents feeding the god, but in a way not to be subsumed under one concept with laying the god's table. But for us the question is whether the rituals common to the Aegean and Levant give blood a special rôle.

Of the two, Greek ritual is better documented. In fact, ordinary Greek sacrifice did not bother about the blood. It did not belong to the gods. Men ate it, e. g., *Odyssey* xviii, 44-49, and we know this attitude aroused revulsion among Jews later. Most important, the cult of the dead and the netherworld did stress blood. In other words, blood is connected with death, not life. This needs following up, but it will be postponed until we finish the survey of other evidence.

In western Asia we know that Ugarit had burnt offerings and "peace offerings" (*šrp wšlmm*). The parallel with Israel is all the more striking when a sacrificial tariff combines them with an offering of two birds. This simply confirms the commonly accepted fact that Israelite rubrics were borrowed from the Syro-Phoenician environment. But the Ugaritic texts show no special concern for blood in ritual. King Keret washes and reddens (*wy'adm*) his arms ritually, but this is *preparation* for sacrifice. Whatever the purpose of this, what is significant for our context is precisely that it is not sacrificial blood which is used.<sup>18</sup>

Until recently the sacrificial tariff just noted might have come into our question. Its opening line, [ *šlh npš t' w[ x x x ]bđm*, might have been taken to mean "... absolution of a person, and offering ... with blood." This could hardly mean anything but a connection of a blood rite and purification. However, the restoration of the latter part of the tablet rules this out, for line 13 has *kbd* and line 16 *kbdm* listed among offerings. Instead of a reference to *dm* ("blood") then, in line

<sup>16</sup> On the community between Greek and Levantine sacrificial ritual see D. Gill "Thysia and šlamim: Questions to R. Schmid's *Das Bundesopfer in Israel*," *Biblica* 47 (1966), pp. 255-61; R. de Vaux, *Studies in OT Sacrifice*, pp. 48-50.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. A. Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques. Mission de Ras Shamra*, x. Paris, 1963, text 36 with *addenda* from RS24, 253, and Lev 1 14-17, 12 14 22, 30-31; for Ugaritic *šrp* as holocaust, cf. A. DeGuglielmo, "Sacrifice in the Ugaritic Texts," *CBQ*, 17 (1955), p. 204.

<sup>18</sup> DeGuglielmo, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

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we must assume one to *kbdm* offerings, which are otherwise unexplained but which are not connected with blood in our texts.<sup>19</sup>

The psalms themselves give some evidence for popular belief about blood and sacrifice in the Levant. Ps 50 13, "Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" is directed against a people contaminated by Canaanite ideas. Does the reproof misinterpret alien practice, as is common in Judeo-Christian polemic?<sup>20</sup> Or was Yahweh indeed popularly thought to be like the gods of the netherworld who, as we shall see, did drink blood? In any event, the text is an ironical question implying that those reprov'd knew that the answer was no. Such irony is no basis for a serious theory of sacrifice. Ps 16 4 is more difficult, and it is to be understood in a special context, as we shall see later.<sup>21</sup>

For completeness we may mention our meager South Arabian information. The word for altar is *mdhbh*, there was burnt offering (*mšrb*), and animal offerings were important.<sup>22</sup> However, there is nothing explicit about the meaning or use of blood. Thus the Levant and South Arabia shared some ritual words and concepts, but the texts do not take us beyond this to a special meaning for blood in general.

This is not to say that ritual use of blood is unmentioned outside Israel. It is, in rituals pertaining to the dead or to the gods of death. This is found in the standard Babylonian form of the story of Etana (*Marsh Tablet*, lines 34-36):

Daily Etana beseeches Shamash:

"Thou hast eaten, O Shamash, the fat of my sheep,

<sup>19</sup> *sh* in line 1 may mean "sprinkle" or "forgive," reminding one of the place of blood in Israelite purifications, but the word is a hapax in Ugaritic and so no solid base for a theory of sacrifice. Besides, the context of *npš* in line 16 implies a cult object, probably a stela (for parallels cf. C. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, p. 446), which might be purified with blood (pure assumption!), but in the tariff much more likely is the object of offerings.

<sup>20</sup> As in Deutero-Isaiah's caricature of the function of idols, or *Epistle of Diognetus* 28, which sees Greek sacrifice in Jewish terms.

<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that even the common Punic expression *mlk 'dm* has been referred to blood offerings by taking the aleph as prosthetic, leaving the root *dm* (J.-C., Février, *RHR*, 143 (1953), p. 11). Were this correct, it need refer to no more than animal sacrifice, but the prosthetic aleph is not normal in Punic (J. Friedrich, *Phönisch-Punische Grammatik*, Rome, 1951, no. 95); the suggestion should be rejected. For a discussion of *mlk 'dm* from other aspects, see de Vaux, *Studies in OT Sacrifice*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>22</sup> For South Arabia see G. Ryckmans, "Les religions arabe préislamiques," p. 217 (see n. 9 *supra*). The Levantine Semites and South Arabians also shared a common form of nomenclature (M. Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung*. BWANT, III, 10, pp. 52-54). Note too that Hebrew, South Arabic, Phoenician, Punic, and Aramaic share a name for altar based on the root *dbh* with *mem* prefixed; but they share the idea, not the name, of whole or burnt offering: Ugaritic, *šrp*; Heb. and bibl. Aram., *'lh*; S. Ar. *mšrb*; Punic, *kl* (or, late, *'l*).

the netherworld has drunk the blood of my lambs;  
the gods I have honored,  
the ghosts (*ejimmu*) I have revered."

Blood belongs to the lower regions. If it revived its ghosts (we are not told), this would recall the idea that "in the blood is life," though not in the biblical sense. Essentially blood belongs to the gods of death not life.

Other religious practices relate blood to the underworld. Indeed *Iliad* xiv, 518 and xvii, 86 even equate blood with soul and life, but in a figure of speech based on the common observation that blood and life go together. In ritual, blood was used in the cult of the dead. The oldest evidence is *Odyssey* x-xi, where the "strengthless dead" attain a semblance of life by drinking blood from the offerings, but all remain brooding and sinister (contrast *Iliad* xxiii, 34: "Everywhere about the body blood ran by the cupful," which is merely an expression of Achilles' heroic bounty at Patroclus' funeral feast). This sinister aspect of the ritual use of blood appears in the very vocabulary of Greek. In the Boeotian dialect death rites were called "pourings of blood" (*αιμακον ριαι*) but in standard Greek *εναγισματα*, a noun built on the phrase *εν αργει*, "under a curse." These things were horrors, as in Euripides' picture of Death personified skulking about the tomb to suck the "gory clots" of blood. This picture is verified by Athenian vase paintings of the era.<sup>23</sup> The older poem could still have the blood revivify the dead temporarily, the later brings out the feeling involved more vividly. Perhaps in the old idea there is something of blood as life, but it is eerie, partial, and at the opposite pole of true life. — *something like that*

There is further evidence associating blood with sinister, if different gods. The Hittite war god was drawn to blood.<sup>24</sup> This attraction characterizes also the Canaanite Anat, a classic example of the combined war-love goddess, who glories in gore and drinks her brother's blood.<sup>25</sup> Rather than blood being representative of life and so of the beneficent divine in the ancient Semitic-Aegean world generally, such evidence as we have associates blood with death and its divinities.

The Bible also associates blood with rites for the dead. Lev 19 and Deut 14 1 prohibit gashing oneself in mourning to keep Yahweh's people from shedding blood in rites like those of their gentile neighbors. The theory that drought was connected with the death of the rain god

<sup>23</sup> *Alkestis* 837-56; for the vase paintings see L. Weber, *Euripedes Alkestis*. Leipzig 1930, *in loc.*

<sup>24</sup> Goetze, *Kleinasiens*, p. 160.

<sup>25</sup> Anat II, lines 5-34, and M. Astour, "Un texte d'Ugarit récemment découvert et ses rapports avec l'origine des cultes bachiques grecs," *RHR*, 164 (1963), pp. 4-11 and *Helleno-semitica*, Leiden, 1965, p. 180. Plutarch, *de Iside* 46 (ed. F. Dübner, p. 432) describes a "Zoroastrianism" where blood is offered to Hades and darkness

Blood makes  
the Spiritually  
dead live



explains the actions of the Baalist prophets in I Kings 18 28 in this light. Blood is connected with death. It has already been suggested that Ps 50 13 condemns a popular misconception of the God of Israel as one of these gods who liked or needed blood, and this may explain the very difficult text, Ps 16 4:

ירבו עצבותם  
אחר מדרו  
בל־אִסִּיךְ נִסְכֵּיהֶם מָרָם  
וּבִל־אִשָּׁא אֶת־שְׁמוֹתֵם עַל־שַׁפְתִּי

The "libations of blood" in *ba* is hardly a metaphor for bloodshed as is often suggested, for *baβ*, "names on my lips," surely refers to a magic or ritual invocation and calls for a parallel action in the first half-line. The suggestion that we read *middēm*, northern dialect for "from (my) hands," in *ba*<sup>26</sup> is tempting, but it avoids the question of the kind of rite involved. Admittedly the first part of the verse is disturbed, but *aa* is clear enough: "They multiply their aches." But who were "they?" Apparently those seeking relief from present pain (they multiply, not begin it) from the wrong source, for the psalmist is contrasting his Yahwist piety with their impiety. That is, they turn to the kind of god who liked "libations of blood," that is, the gods of wounds and death, as we have seen.<sup>27</sup>

We are left with but one important piece of evidence, the apotropaic rites of Arabs like that of the Passover. Modern observers attest the anointing of doors, tents, animals with blood to ward off evil spirits.<sup>28</sup> This might be subject to the objection that such late evidence may stem from some remnant of influence from Jewish ritual. Possibly it may, but the rites are not so like the Jewish in detail that one senses an influence from that direction on them (or on their description), as in Nilus. Moreover, these rites are especially characteristic of nomadic Arabs and not entirely in accord with their Mohammedism. In view of this and of the fact that the Passover rite was in a sense extra-Israelite, in being an old nomadic rite taken into Yahwism,<sup>29</sup> it is not unreasonable to see this blood rite as part of the culture of proto-Semitic nomads

<sup>26</sup> M. Dahood, *The Psalms* I., pp. 88-89.

<sup>27</sup> This argues for reading or understanding *al* (Kraus, Weiser) at the beginning of *baβ*, for indeed "they multiply their pains who seek another god," Resheph or the like, with "libations of blood" and incantations.

<sup>28</sup> References in de Vaux, *Studies in OT Sacrifice*, pp. 7-8. The claim that blood rites are common to all hunters and their herdsmen successors, hence to the primitive Semites, goes too far. For discussion see R. J. Thompson, *Penitence and Sacrifice in Early Israel*, pp. 35-38.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. R. de Vaux, *Les institutions de l'Ancien Testament*, II, pp. 389-90, and *Studies in OT Sacrifice*, pp. 2-12.

or seminomads. Even so, we are not back at our starting point, the claim that blood was generally considered divine and life-giving and as the basis of sacrificial ritual. The blood of Passover and analogous rites does protect life, but it does not communicate it. It wards off the Destroyer because it is a protective sign. One might speculate that the power of the sign lay in the Destroyer's aversion to the divine element, but this is not said and it is not a necessary conclusion. Destructive powers were attracted, not repelled, by blood, as we have seen. It might even be that the sign worked because it showed that the Destroyer had been given his bloody due.

In fact, the peculiar efficacy of blood is not really explained in the rite. Need we assume that it was spelled out in terms of life or horror or anything else? The rite was simply accepted as potent in accordance with the common phenomenon of sacral action coming well before its explanatory verbalization. Passoverlike blood rites may well have been in the ritual of the earliest nomads of the Near East, but the intrinsic meaning of blood is still not spelled out, and the explicit claim that blood is life and so divine remains isolated to Israel.

Finally, we may note that representations of Mithras' slaughter of a bull left by the cult popular in the later Roman army sometimes show the blood of the bull springing immediately into grain, a clear equation of blood with fertility and so life, but this does not seem to have been a very old idea. The original Mithras protected contracts and befriended cattle, and his proper sacrifice in ancient India was milk, butter and grain.<sup>30</sup> Even if Mithraism has appropriated an old myth, it is not simply blood but any part of the sacred bull which produces plant life.<sup>31</sup> The same picture of blood as seed of life appears in the Attis cult,<sup>32</sup> which eventually produced the taurobolium. The Attis cult had ancient antecedents in Asia Minor, and the bull was a widespread symbol of fertility, but the question is what part blood played in this in the early stages. The bull's evident male power made him a symbol. Even in the Attis myth it is the blood of his castration which yields life. Is it the blood or the male member which really signifies life? The second view is supported by the myth of Uranus and the birth of Aphrodite. On the other hand, the blood of Attis' beloved, Ia, also springs up into an almond tree when she kills herself upon news of his death. However

<sup>30</sup> A. Hillebrandt, *Vedische Mythologie* II, p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> See illustration 28 and discussion on pp. 128, 130, in R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*. See also M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, the Secret God*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>32</sup> For the aspects of the Attis myth discussed, see H. Hepding, *Attis: seine Mythen und sein Kult*, pp. 106-07, 119. Note that even the ancients sometimes interpreted the blood rites of the Attis cult as funereal mourning rites, expressions of regret having nothing to do with giving new life: *ibid.*, pp. 43, 158, 160.

this touch sounds like the widespread folklore motif of plants from the graves of star-crossed lovers (as *Barbry Allen*) and not like basic myth. On balance, in the orientalizing religions we seem to be dealing with later developments, not basic, universal belief in the power of blood.

This survey of the actual data from the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world does not offer any real support for a theory of sacrifice based on the sharing of a divine substance, blood. In fact, it shows a complexity hard to reduce to any common denominator.

1) There were two general concepts of offerings to the gods prevalent in the area. One, Hittite, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian saw them as simply provisioning the deities. The other, Greek, Levantine, and perhaps South Arabian, burned the god's share. Seemingly the gods needed this portion too, but the basic idea is quite different from laying a table and waiting for the god to consume the food. Further and to our purpose, neither concept generally attributes importance to blood as such.

2) Blood is attractive to certain powers, but these are associated with unpleasantness, war, and death. The meaning of blood in this sphere is ambiguous. It may temporarily revivify, but in an eerie way. Blood is associated not with true life, but with its pale and ghostly counterpart. This concept of the power of blood crosses the lines of the different concepts of sacrifice we have seen, for it appears in Mesopotamia as well as in Greece and the Levant.

3) The apotropaic use of blood seems to be a practice of Semitic nomads. Its meaning in this use is not self-evident. Does it give life or show that the powers of darkness have had their share?

4) Hebrew ritual is much concerned with blood. It must be reserved to God, and it is a purifying agent. This is explained by the fact that "in the blood is life"; so blood belongs to the divine sphere. The explicit statement of this doctrine comes in deuteronomic and priestly documents, but they are explaining a ritual much older than they.

5) Can we give any explanation of this peculiar concern for blood in the Hebrew ritual? An answer must be highly speculative. We do know that the primitive Passover emphasized the use of blood. May this not have been added to a ritual largely borrowed from Canaan in its details? Such mixings of rituals were acceptable enough. For instance, though Hebrew ritual was essentially of the burnt-offering type, it took over without embarrassment aspects of the banquet concept.<sup>33</sup> Later theologizing would explain the hybrid ritual in a rather sophisticated manner. The developments in the Mithras and Attis cults might be analogies illustrating this process of theological reflection. From the sacrifice of

<sup>33</sup> Compare the shewbread, the boiling of the sacrificial meat in I Sam, and the daily ritual at Uruk (*ANET*, p. 344b)

the bull, the symbol of fertility, came the idea that its blood was a source of new life. So in Israel the old apotropaic rite would be generalized, and, from a mere sign, the blood would become a vehicle of divine purification and life.

Another possibility is opened by Rendtorff's form- and tradition-historical study of Israelite sacrifice.<sup>34</sup> He finds that originally the manipulation of blood had no rôle in עלה or זבח. It did have a purificatory function in the חטאת and a public, ritual function in the שלמים which closed off the עלות. This is especially significant because older Levantine people (Ugarit) had the sequence *šrp wšlmm*. Did this also include blood rites which Israel borrowed along with the ritual of the area? Once more, it is tempting to think so, and it is entirely possible; but once again we must emphasize that we do not know. In any case, blood rites came to be part of all Israelite sacrifice in a process culminating shortly after Josiah's reform. Thus, even though the *šlmm* were the source of the ritual use of blood, the *general* explanation of sacrifice in terms of blood as life and so somehow divine would still be relatively late and specifically Israelite. We must, then, conclude that the evidence from the ancient Semitic and Aegean areas does not show a general belief outside Israel in blood as a divine element which served as the basic reason or explanation for sacrifice. As far as we know, the reservation of blood to God because it was life and so divine is specifically Israelite.

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<sup>34</sup> R. Rendtorff, *Studien zur Geschichte des Opfers im alten Israel*, WMANT. 3. On חטאת see pp. 205-06, 231-32; on עלות and שלמים, pp. 119-32; on the spread of blood rites, pp. 97-101, 156-57, 247.