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A COMPARISON OF SOME FEATURES OF HEBREW AND BABYLONIAN RITUAL

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HOWEVER varied and manifold the religious ideas of early men may be, there is a considerable element that is substantially the same in all the early religions of the world. This common element is naturally larger in peoples that have, at least in part, a common ancestry. It is the purpose of this paper to call attention to some features common to the sacrificial ritual of the Hebrews and the Babylonians—features that were developed differently among the two peoples, but which, if not derived from the influences of a common ancestry, indicate a similar psychological reaction to the facts of life.

The features which will be especially compared are: the idea that sacrifice was food offered to the gods: that the materials offered were those which constituted the food of the worshippers: that certain portions of these sacrifices were thought to act in some mysterious way to protect the worshipper from violations of taboo, conscious or unconscious: that other portions of them were apportioned to the priests and became the substance of their living: and that in both countries a feature of the sacrifice was the "waving" or "heaving" of parts of the sacrifice as an important part of the ritual. This corresponded in form to the "Elevation of the Host" in Christian ritual. While we can trace it in Babylonia, we cannot trace its details as clearly as in the Old Testament.

The Hebrew sources of information for our study are the various strata of the Priestly Law in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. It is not necessary for our present purpose to

distinguish between the different strata of this ritual. For the Babylonian ritual we have no such body of codified regulations; for the various rituals for the casting out of demons, although they afford some interesting illustrative material, hardly belong to legitimate temple worship. We have, nevertheless, in the historical inscriptions of four early Babylonian monarchs descriptions of sacrifices and of sacrificial material which afford some basis of comparison. It will be convenient first to adduce evidence to show that both people regarded sacrifice as food, and that they each had a sin-offering, and after that review in some detail certain great Hebrew ritual regulations, and then some Babylonian regulations and sacrificial provisions.

That Hebrews had regarded sacrifice as food offered to God is made evident by the language of the 50th Psalm. The author of this Psalm had outgrown the view, but many of his contemporaries had not and he sought by means of irony to make them see the absurdity of their belief. He represents God as saying:

"If I were hungry, I would not tell thee;
For the world is mine, and the fullness thereof.
Will I eat the flesh of bulls,
Or drink the blood of goats?
Offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving;
And pay thy vows unto the Most High;
And call upon me in the day of trouble:
I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

As one does not employ sarcasm against bootleggers where bootleggers are unknown, so the irony of this passage is a guarantee of the fact that Hebrew thought had passed through a stage in which sacrifice was regarded as food given to God to supply his needs. This view of sacrifices has left other traces on the pages of the Old Testament. It underlies the phrase employed in connection with sacrifices, "Yahweh smelled the sweet savor" or "odor,"¹ which we find in Gen. 8 21 in connection with the sacrifice of Noah, and which is found in a large number

¹ Yahweh, now regarded as too spiritual actually to eat flesh, was thought to inhale his portion as an odor.

of sacrifices in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The idea also underlies the statement in Ex. 24 10, 11, "They"—Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy elders—"saw God and ate and drank." All this is well known. W. Robertson Smith and Professor Toy called attention to these facts forty years ago.

That the same conception existed among the early Babylonians is clear from the following passage in Eannatum's Stele of the Vultures; *utu lugal-zal-sig-ga-ka arar^{ki} ê-bâr-bâr ninda-gud-šû an-kû utu lug[al]-mu-[ra]*: "Utu"—i. e., the sun-god—"king of abundant brilliance, at Larsa, in Ebarbar, with a captured bullock I fed.—For Utu, my king." The last phrase is probably a ritual phrase pronounced over the beast. The identity of this conception of sacrifice with the Hebrew conception set forth above needs no demonstration. It is in much cruder form than the Hebrew, but it comes from a much earlier time—about 3000 B. C. Similarly Gudea, after describing in Cylinder B the food which he collected in the newly rebuilt temple of Eninnu, calls it *gar kû dingir-ri-ne-kam*, "food for the eating of the gods." This same view, though not so definitely expressed, underlies the presentation of large quantities of food to deities by other Babylonian rulers, of which mention will be made later.

The daily sacrifices of the Israelites consisted of food materials: bullocks, rams, lambs, and goats with fine flour mingled with oil. At the Passover a lamb was offered, $\frac{3}{10}$ of an Ephah of fine flour mingled with oil, and $\frac{1}{4}$ of a hin of wine (Lev. 23 10 11). A later addition to the Priests' Code (Nu. 28) provides that every day of the seven-day festival two young bullocks, one ram, and seven male yearling lambs, with their meal-offerings of fine flour mingled with oil, shall be offered (Nu. 28 16–24). At the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost the offering according to Lev. 23 15–21 was 2 loaves containing a certain quantity of flour, 7 yearling he-lambs, a bullock and 2 rams with their meal offerings and drink-offerings of wine (Lev. 23 17, 18). In Nu. 28 27 this law is changed to 2 bullocks, one ram, and 7 he-lambs. The sacrifices for the Feast of Succoth in the seventh month are not definitely specified in Lev. 23, but the supplementary law of Nu. 29 elaborately supplies the deficiency. Preceding the Feast there were two

holy assemblies, one on the 1st of the month and the other on the 10th, at each of which the offering was 1 bullock, 1 ram, and 7 yearling he-lambs. During the Feast itself, which lasted 7 days and began on the 15th day of the month, the sacrifices were as follows: on the first day 13 bullocks, 2 rams and 14 yearling he-lambs with their meal-offerings. On the second day 12 bullocks and the same number of rams and lambs as before. Each succeeding day of the Feast the number of bullocks was diminished by one until, on the 7th day of the Feast, only 7 bullocks were offered, the number of rams and lambs remaining constant throughout. On the 18th day one bullock, one ram, and 7 yearling he-lambs were offered, this being the ordinary daily offering. All these offerings consisted of food such as the worshippers enjoyed.

In addition to these there were other offerings. Every morning and evening a lamb was slaughtered and burned. This was the זָבַח or ascending-offering, translated burnt-offering. It was consumed by fire and ascended as smoke. Along with it an offering of fine flour mingled with oil was also burned (cf. Nu. 28 1-10).

Still in addition to all these was the sin- or trespass-offering. This was originally an offering to placate the deity for the conscious or unconscious violation of taboo, as is made clear by the fifth chapter of Leviticus. It was then called זָבַח (Lev. 7 1). Later it was connected with more moral delinquencies and the name was changed to זָבַח (so throughout Nu. 28 and 29). The transition can be traced in Leviticus 4 and 5, where the verbs זָבַח and זָבַח are employed as synonyms. The materials for this offering varied according to the status, nature, and wealth of the perpetrator of the deed, and in some respects as time passed were apparently modified, when the sinner was the whole congregation, but in every instance the offering was an animal that could be eaten. Thus for the violation of a taboo, whether by an individual or the whole congregation, the offering was at first a bullock (Lev. 4 3, 4, 14); later the offering became in the case of a נָשִׂיא (prince, or wealthy man) a he-goat (Lev. 4 22ff.); in the case of a common man, a she-goat (Lev. 4 27ff.); and for a poor person, two turtle-doves or two

young pigeons (Lev. 5 ff.). In the later legislation of Nu. 28 and 29 a sin-offering is to be offered on each especially holy day in addition to the offerings prescribed for that day and, although the offering is apparently made in behalf of the entire assembly, it consists, according to this legislation, uniformly of a he-goat (see Nu. 28 15, 30 and 29 4, 11, 18, 20, 25, 28, 31, 34, 38).

Still another offering was the **שְׁלֵמִים** (regularly used in the plural), the object of which appears to have been to re-establish friendly relations with the deity, when these were known to have been sundered, or fear was entertained that they might have been interrupted; this sacrifice also commemorated victories, the consecration of kings and sanctuaries, and the re-establishment of peace. Thus Joshua offered **שְׁלֵמִים** or peace-offerings after the victory at Ai (Josh. 8 31). This sacrifice was offered when Israel had nearly wiped out the tribe of Benjamin (Jud. 20 26), and again when they decided to make peace with that tribe (Jud. 21 4). It was offered when Saul was consecrated king (1 Sam. 10 8; 11 15); when David brought the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6 17), and when he consecrated to Yahweh the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (2 Sam. 24 25); and Solomon offered it when consecrated king at Gibeon (1 Kgs. 3 15), when he consecrated the Temple (1 Kgs. 8 63), and ordained that it should be offered thrice each year (1 Kgs. 9 25). It was also a part of the ritual by which a vow was discharged (Nu. 6 14). The offerings consisted of oxen (**שְׂמֹרִים**), rams, or goats, together with a bloodless offering of unleavened cakes mingled with oil and fine flour (Lev. 9 18; 7 12, 13). The fat of the **שְׁלֵמִים** was burned (Lev. 7 22ff.), but the flesh eaten. The regular rule was that the flesh should be eaten the day it was offered (Lev. 7 15); it might, however, be eaten on the second day, but, if any of it remained until the third day, it had to be burned (Lev. 7 16, 17). This sacrifice, then, was clearly commensal.

Further, when priests were consecrated there was a special sacrifice, which consisted of a bullock, two rams, and bread with unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and wafers unleavened, anointed with oil (Ex. 29 1, 2). In connection with vows, there were two kinds of sacrifice. A man under a vow bound himself to observe various taboos: he must drink no wine, eat no grapes

in any form, let his hair remain uncut, and keep clear of all contact with a dead body. If by accidental contact with any dead thing he violated a taboo, he must offer two turtle doves or two young pigeons, and bring a yearling male lamb for an **עֹלָה**, and shall begin again the period he had vowed to observe the taboos. When the period of the vow had been successfully discharged, he was required to offer a yearling male lamb as an **עֹלָה**, a yearling ewe as a **זֶבַח**, and a ram as a **שְׁלֵמִים**. This last was accompanied with unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, wafers anointed with oil, and drink-offerings, presumably of wine (see Nu. 6 9-12, 13-15). Once more, when a woman was suspected of infidelity to her husband, she brought an offering of $\frac{1}{10}$ ephah of barley meal as an offering with which the sacred instrument which constituted her ordeal was to be prepared (Nu. 5 15).

In the period when Hebrew ritual was fully developed, the priests offered these sacrifices, and as a reward for their services received a portion of certain offerings. These constituted their living, or, at least, a portion of it. In the case of the **עֹלָה** the fat, the tail, the fat on the inwards, the kidneys, caul, and liver were burned; the rest, together with the accompanying bread and oil offering, the priests ate (Lev. 7 6-10). In case of a **שְׁלֵמִים**, the priest had the breast and the right thigh (Lev. 7 30-34). Similarly, when priests were consecrated, the priests had the breast and the thigh as well as the flesh of the ram, together with the bread-offering (Lev. 7 26-32). Also, when the Nazarite discharged his vow, the priest had a boiled shoulder, the "wave-breast" and the "heave-thigh" as his portion. Apparently all of the meal offering brought by a woman suspected of adultery, except what was sprinkled on the water that she was made to drink and a handful that was burned on the altar, became the priest's.

In connection with these portions which the priests received the laws enjoin one interesting bit of ritual—they are to be "waved" (**וַיַּגִּדוּ** from **וַיִּגְדוּ** "shake to and fro") or "heaved" (**וַיַּחֲבִיטוּ**, the Hophal of **וַיִּחַבְּטוּ**, "be high"). This interesting bit of ritual, analogous to the elevation of the Host and the presentation of offerings, can be traced in Babylonia, as we shall see.

Another interesting bit of Hebrew ritual consisted in placing on a table before the symbol of Yahweh a number of loaves of bread. These were called **לֶחֶם הַפְּנִינִי**, "bread of the presence," translated in our English Bibles "show-bread." It was God's bread and could be eaten only by priests (Matt. 12 4). All this Hebrew ritual illumines for us Babylonian ritual, and is in turn illumined by it.

Turning now to Babylonia, the sources of our information for Babylonian religious ritual are certain of the royal inscriptions of its early kings and patesis, especially those of Eannatum, Urkagina, Manishtusu, and Gudea. The last three of these rulers have left long lists of offerings, which abundantly prove that the sacrifices consisted of food. It will tend to clarify briefly to summarize each of these.

Urkagina, who was king of Lagash about 2800 B. C., found his people suffering from a number of oppressive exactions, and tells in three or four of his inscriptions of the reforms which he instituted in the interest of the people. One of these reforms was a reduction in the number and cost of the offerings exacted in connection with deaths and funerals.² The amount of the exactions and the percentage of reduction which the record contains are not of interest here. What is of interest is that the offerings consisted of beer, bread, meal, ears of corn, a garment, a turban, a kafiyeh(?) and a bed. Specified quantities of certain things went to certain priests. What these were and how they were treated, will be noted later.

Manishtusu, of the dynasty of Agade and Kish, who lived about a hundred years later, tells in his cruciform inscription how he doubled the daily offerings to the god Shamash and his consort Malkatu. Formerly a bullock had been allowed for a feast of three days; he increased it to a bullock a day. The offerings which he mentions consisted of bullocks, sheep, meal of the various kinds of grain, dates, oil, milk, reed—cane, honey, and various vestments and turbans for different seasons of the year.³

² Urkagine, Cones B & C, col. vi, 4—29; col. ix, 35—xi, 1.

³ Cruciform Monument, col. v, 16—col. xii, 2.

Two hundred and fifty years later Gudea, who in many inscriptions refers to his rebuilding of the temple Eninnu at Lagash, gives in two inscriptions the details of the offering which he provided for the festival of the New Year.⁴ He calls this offering the marriage portion of the goddess Bau. The festival of the New Year coincided approximately with the beginning of the annual rise of the Tigris river. This was followed by the rise of the Euphrates, and on the fructifying power of these waters the fertility of Babylonia depended. Water was regarded as the spermatozoa of the gods; it flowed, therefore, as the result of a marital union between god and goddess. Such a marital union Gudea frankly describes as having taken place in the bridal chamber of his new temple.⁵ It was doubtless this conception which gave the name to this offering. The offering itself consisted of a fat bullock, a fat sheep, 3 corn-fed sheep, 6 rams, 2 lambs, 7 rations of dates, 7 jars of butter, 7 palm-tree hearts, fig-cakes, birds which may have been ducks and drakes, 15 cranes, quantities of fish, and quantities of vegetables and aromatic wood.

Special sacrifices for other occasions also consisted of food. Thus in Cylinder A Gudea tells us that, when he offered a prayer to a god for a special oracle, "bringing an unblemished bullock and an unblemished kid he sacrificed them."⁶

This is sufficient proof that in Babylonia as in Israel the materials of the sacrifices consisted of food-stuffs. The evidence for this could be indefinitely extended, not only from the temple and palace archives of Lagash, but from those of other cities.

Another analogy with the Hebrew ritual is the fact that the Babylonian priests received certain parts of the offerings as their reward for performing the services. This we learn from the account of Urkagina's reform. He says that, at a burial, a priest who poured the libation received 60 *gas* of grain. The magician received 420 loaves and 7 jars of beer—3 after the

⁴ Statue E, vi, 19—vii 15; Statue G, col. iii, 8—17.

⁵ Cylinder B, col. xvii, 2—12.

⁶ Col. xviii, 7: *gud-dū maš-dū tūm giš-ne-tak*. Cyl. B, vii, 4 ff. adds to the bullock and kid: *udu še gar-ud-da ga maš-lulim-ma*: "a sheep, grain, white bread and the milk of young *lulim*-sheep."

reform. One of the oppressive customs which Urkagina abolished was the habit that another class of priests (the *pašišu*, or anointing-priests) had of going into a man's field and measuring the standing grain and taking a part of it. They would also compel people to give them sacrificial lambs to sell. They impressed men and asses into their service. These oppressive customs Urkagina abolished, but he left the priests a legitimate portion of the offerings. In the *Museum Journal* for September 1926 M. Legrain reports the finding of the temple kitchen in the temple of Ningal at Ur. It was equipped with ovens for roasting and kettles for boiling in a way that reminds one of the boiling of the sacrifice in Ephraim in the days of Eli and the preference of Eli's sons for roast meat rather than boiled.

Again: as in Israel the priests' portions were elevated, "heaved," or "waved" before the priests appropriated them, so in Babylonia. Thus Urkagina says⁷ that the attendants elevated (*il-la*) the portion of grain for the libation-pourer at a burial and took it away. The "wife of the god" (the chief priestess) had as a part of her portion "one large loaf for a heave-offering" (*i gar-sag-lal-sal*).⁸ Among the items which the chief magician took were "5 loaves for the wave-offering" (*v gar lù-zi(g)-ga-ka*; cf. *OBW*, no. 91⁹).⁹ That a part of the ritual consisted in elevating the offering is also shown by a passage in Gudea's Cylinder B.¹⁰ In describing the great ceremony by which Ningirsu, the principal god of Lagash was inducted into his new temple, Gudea represents the other gods of his pantheon as performing many parts of the ritual, and he describes the portion of the service performed by the goddess Nina in these words: "The princess of protective oracles, Nina, sang a holy song—she sang it in the temple; she placed the mark on a black, pregnant ewe; she raised it up to heaven and shut it in the fold." (*min-garza-kal-la-gè ðnina šir-azag gú-zu è-a ba-an-gú ganam-gig-gi dubbin mi-ni-ib-kin im-ma-al an-na-gè amaš ši-ba-an-ni-ib-sá*).

Another institution common to the Babylonians and the

⁷ Col. vii, 26 ff.

⁸ Col. x, 8 ff.

⁹ Col. x, 18.

¹⁰ Col. iv, 6—9.

Hebrews was the table of "Show Bread." The evidence for this comes from the inscription of Urkagina already referred to. Thus in Cones B and C, col. x, 12—17, after stating that 420 loaves of *bī-bī*-bread were placed as food, he says "40 hard-baked loaves were set in the presence; 1 loaf was for the table." The phrase translated "were set in the presence" is *nī gub-ba-an*, in which *nī* is the Sumerian for the Akkadian *appu* or *panū* "face."¹¹ The phrase recalls the Hebrew **לֶחֶם פָּנִים** applied to the show-bread. Both phrases imply that the bread was placed in the presence of a god. True, there were differences in the two rituals. The Hebrews had twelve loaves, all of which were placed on the sacred table; the Babylonians had 40 loaves for the "presence" and only one for the table.

The Hebrew classification of sacrifices as **זָבַח**, **שְׁלֵמִים** etc., has been noticed above. To this distinction I have noted in the royal inscriptions no complete Babylonian parallel. There seems, however, to be a parallel to the **𒀭𒀪** in Eannatum's Stele of the Vultures. In connection with the oaths which he made the men of Umma swear he mentions several times¹² the offering of doves in the presence of the gods. Sometimes 2 were offered; sometimes 4. He describes the sacrifice by a compound sign for which as yet no ideographic meaning is known; it is *BI + SĪG*. As doves were one of the possible sin-offerings among the Hebrews, it seems fair to suppose that *BI + SĪG* indicated a sin-offering. Eannatum's formula is: *tu^h ii-nam igi-ba bi + sig ba-ni-gar dūl-sag-ba ni-mi-dū*: "2 doves before them I offered as a sin-offering; their necks and heads I offered as incense."

This brief article but touches the surface of a vast subject.¹³

¹¹ *OBW*, 15 4 and 24.

¹² See, e. g., Obverse, col. xviii, 2 ff.; Rev. 1, 35 ff.

¹³ In the comparison made above care has been taken to draw material only from sources which reveal the public religious ritual of the Babylonians. The incantation texts which deal with the casting out of demons, whether they be demons of disease or not, have been purposely avoided, for the simple reason that the object of the paper was to compare Hebrew religious ritual with Babylonian religious ritual, and magic is not religion. Broadly speaking magic is a system of compulsion of supernatural spirits; religion is a system of supplication and persuasion of them. Magic is no more religion than turning on an electric current

Were the writer to permit himself to go into other matters, such as taboos, many other parallels could be presented. The purpose of this paper was to call attention to a field little explored hitherto. The complete exploration the writer must leave to others.

to produce light, or giving an antitoxin to kill germs, is religion. Magic is a system of compulsion; religion is a system of fellowship—fellowship with beings or a being beyond man's comprehension and beyond his control—beings therefore which call forth in him admiration, awe, wonder, homage, love. It is quite true that in practice religion and magic often coalesce. In many religions sacrifices have been offered to cure disease, just as in Babylonian magic, rites which amount to sacrifices are employed to expel the demons of sickness. Some modern Christians seem to regard prayer and the Holy Communion as similar instruments for the cure of disease. Doubtless, too, the Hebrew *qam*, employed for the removal of the consequences of breaking a taboo, was thought to act automatically in a magic-like manner. Many parallels to this type of sacrifice can be found in Babylonian texts. Nevertheless it seems fairer to compare the official and conscious religion of the one people with the conscious and official religion of the other. Only in a detailed and exhaustive study of the meaning of individual sacrifices could comparison rightly be made, in the judgment of the writer, between Hebrew material and that of the incantation texts.