Firstlings and Other Sacrifices.

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IN another place I have sought to show that the leading ritualistic institutions of the ancient Israelites rest on a Semitic basis.[1] My investigations conducted during the summer of 1902 furnish fresh examples.

However, before narrating the facts concerning the sacrifice of firstlings, it will be of interest to know the reason, as related by himself, which moved a simple Arab to offer a sacrifice, while I journeyed with him from Medeba toward the Wa'le.

One night he had a vision of Moses, who appeared to him as a man of superhuman size riding on a horse as large as a camel. His beard was white, reaching to his saddle, and he had a long, flowing robe. A man went before him, and on either side were two attendants, each of whom had one hand placed on the prophet's knee, while with the other he was holding the border of his robe. My companion was so alarmed by this dream that the next morning he chose the fattest sheep of his flock, cut off the tip of its ear, hung it up to the ceiling of his house to preserve it and his property from harm, and a few days afterward killed the sacrifice in the name of Nebi Mûsa, put a little of the blood on the lintel of the house, and summoned the Arabs of his immediate circle to the feast which followed.

It is common in offering sacrifices, either to mention the name of God, or to repeat the first Sura of the Koran. Among Christians there are well-authenticated instances of repeating the Apostles' Creed, a custom which may have been borrowed from the Moslems, or both Christians and Moslems may have preserved an ancient Semitic custom in connection with sacrifice.

It was only during the summer of 1902 that I heard of the sacrifice of the firstlings of flocks and of camels. This discovery is of great interest in connection with the same institution as set forth in the Old Testament. It is undoubtedly an ancient Semitic usage

[1] Cf. *Primitive Semitic Religion To-day.* Chicago, 1902.

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which the progenitors of the Israelites practised long before the time of Moses and which has lasted down to the present time. Even the terminology in northern Palestine reminds us of the ancient code (Ex. 22[30]), "That which first opens the matrix at Bêt Râs (ancient Capitolias) is sacred to Chuḍr,"[2] *awel fâtiḥat el-ṛanam.*

Passing from northern Palestine to the country east of the Dead Sea, between Medeba and the Wa'le, we find that the Beni Ḥamedi who reside in tents and cultivate the soil, as well as have flocks, say that the first-born of the sheep belongs to Nebi Mûsa, whose shrine is on the west side of the Dead Sea. Those who are able take the first-born to the shrine, others kill it in his name at their tents. The fact that they kill it in his name is of exceeding interest, since sacrifices are usually killed in the name of God. Our authority for the fact that the Arabs kill sacrifices in the name of Moses was the same as for saying, "We worship Moses." Most of the people put some of the blood of the firstling sacrificed upon the flock. They kill it for the sake of a "blessing." It keeps away evil from the man who offers it.

Going still farther south, we find that the Habâḥbi tribe of Arabs, who at the time of my visit were encamped near Shôbek, and who cultivate the soil as well as tend flocks, are accustomed to kill the first-born of the flock, whenever it is possible, at the Shrine of Shahâb ed-Dîn Abu Suleimân, their patron saint; but if they are too far away they kill it at their own tents.

The Arabs of Petra use much the same expressions to designate the firstling of the flock which is to be sacrificed. They call it the "first weaned," *awel faṭm.*

Among the Rualâ, whose quarters extend as far south as Nejd in the Arabian Peninsula, but who spend their summers in the Ḥaurân and whose patron saint is eḍ-Ḍûhûr in the Jauf, there is a great feast in connection with the first-born of the camels. It is a religious festival. There is much rejoicing. Men and women dance.

At the shrine of Jafar, not far south from Kerak, we have an interesting combination of the sacrifice of the firstlings and of the presentation of the first-fruits to the saint, and the beginnings of the butter. It is a widely prevalent custom to present the first-fruits and the churnings of the butter. Thus at Jafar we have an interesting illustration of the story of Cain and Abel. The Arab who has no flocks, but cultivates the soil, naturally brings the first-fruits, and the shepherd brings the first-born of his flock.

[2] This pronunciation instead of Chiḍr is well-nigh universal in Syria.

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Among the 'Amûr Arabs, "in the spring when the first lamb is born in a flock it is reserved for the sacrificial feast. The first of the milk goes to the young. As soon as they begin to make use of the milk the first few churnings of butter are kept religiously for the sacrificial feast. They would not even give it to a guest. This is for the spring festival. When the time comes for the festival they invite all the fellow-clansmen in the vicinity, food is cooked, the animals are roasted and put on the top of large tureens of boiled wheat. Over this *semn* is poured as each relay of feasters comes. Every family has such a feast. If there are many guests they slaughter other animals besides the firstling."[3] When one considers the wide extent of country over which the custom of sacrificing the first-born and presenting the first-fruits is found, it seems pretty good evidence that these are primitive Semitic customs which were naturally incorporated into the Israelitish legislation, without a break from primitive Semitic usage.

In connection with the sacrifice of firstlings I mention sacrifices for flocks as appearing in a new light during the summer of 1902. On the first journey from Damascus into northern Syria we stopped for rest and refreshment at Ḳaseir, about three hours north from Damascus. There at a café we met with Ḳâsim of the 'Ageidât tribe of Arabs, and, in accordance with my habit of investigation, we entered into conversation with him. He told us "if anything was wrong with their flocks, or with their milk, they were in the habit of bringing the entire flock to the shrine of El-'Umari, where there is a Kubbeh, with a grave inside the building. They march them three times around the place. They select a sheep, male or female, and cut off the tip of its ear as an indication that it is designed for sacrifice.[4] No black-faced sheep is used. They cut its throat, which is turned toward the south. The hireling shepherd goes off at once. They take some of the bell-wethers and put the blood on their backs, because they are the sultans of the sheep. They come to the saint and expect him to work a cure for them. Dipping the palm of the hand in the blood they stamp it on the sides of the door. The rest of the blood they pour on the ground and cover it over carefully. The sacrifice is the redemption of the flock. It is offered as a *fedou* in behalf of all the flock."[5] A sufficient number of incidents might

[3] Interview with Ḥayil of Ḳaryatên, who has shared in such feasts. JOURNAL, XIV. Summer of 1902.

[4] This is a very common custom.

[5] JOURNAL, XIV. Spring of 1902.

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be given in many different parts of the country which would serve to show that this custom is universal and primitive. There are minor variations, but the essentials are the same, as will appear from the account of Ḥamdan of Petra as to the customs at the shrines frequented by his fellow-clansmen. When their flocks are ill they take them to one of their shrines, either El-Ḥusîni, or Ataya, or 'Ain Mûsa, or Nebi Ḥarûn, and cause them to go around the shrine three times. When they take their flocks to Nebi Ḥarûn he knows his sacrifice. It stands like a nail. "The idea that the saint designates his sacrifice is a favorite one. The people determine which is the victim, because one remains behind, or looks in at the entrance, or indicates that he is the chosen one in some other way. At Nebi Ḥarûn they always put the blood of the sacrifice on the rock, at the other shrines they put it on the doorposts."

In *Primitive Semitic Religion To-day*, as the result of investigations during the summer of 1901, I mentioned sacrifices between the feet as offered for returning pilgrims and prisoners, but I have found as the result of farther researches last summer that it is not confined to them. When Ḥanna Habaz returned to his home after his family had fulfilled the vow for him, there was a sacrifice offered between his feet before he entered the house.

In certain parts of the country when a bride and groom do not agree, so that there is a quarrel between them, one of the family kills a black sheep or goat, perhaps in his own house. The woman stands over the animal, and they kill it between her feet. The husband steps over the victim and then every machination of the evil spirit will be removed. They take a black animal, because the spirits are black. They put some of the blood on the forehead of the bride and groom.

There are two modes of offering sacrifices between the feet. In one case the legs are extended and the victim lies between the feet; in the other, the one for whom the sacrifice is made steps over the victim just as its throat is cut. In all this there is doubtless an effort to show that the animal represents the one for whom it is vowed. Still another ceremony represents the same effort at appropriation at Mâr Thekla. Every victim that is vowed must be taken inside the shrine of Mâr Thekla, which seems to have been originally a cave. On one side of the room is a short marble column, on the top of which are candles. The boy for whom the vow is made is expected to put his arms around the sacrifice and lead it to the shrine, and then three times around the column before it is slaughtered. If he is only

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a babe and therefore cannot lead the sacrifice, a string is attached to him and the sacrifice, and he thus leads it to the shrine and around the column. As he is too small to step over the blood, he is lifted over it, to express the same idea. The same custom is found among the Arabs who bring their offerings to Sheik Mufleh near eṣ-Ṣalṭ. It may, therefore, be considered primitive, as there is no evidence of any connection whatever between the Syrians of Ma'lula, between those of Jebrud and Damascus, and the Arabs near eṣ-Ṣalṭ, east of the Jordan.

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