

BLOOD EXPIATION IN HITTITE
AND BIBLICAL RITUAL

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Blood Expiation in Hittite and Biblical Ritual
Origins, Context, and Meaning

BLOOD EXPIATION IN HITTITE
AND BIBLICAL RITUAL
ORIGINS, CONTEXT, AND MEANING

YITZHAQ FEDER

Society of Biblical Literature
Atlanta

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אשר בידו מחקרי ארץ
ולגדלתו אין חקר

JERUSALEM, JANUARY 2011

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABoT	<i>Ankara Arkeoloji Müzesinde Boğazköy Tabletleri</i>
<i>AfO</i>	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
<i>AHw</i>	Wolfram von Soden, <i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> . 3 vols. Wiesbaden 1965–1981
Akk	Akkadian
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOATS	Alter Orient und Altes Testament Sonderreihe
<i>AoF</i>	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969
<i>AuOr</i>	<i>Aula Orientalis</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BDB</i>	<i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. Peabody, Mass., 2003 (1906)
BF	Baghdader Forschungen
<i>BiOr</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
<i>CAD</i>	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CHD</i>	<i>The Hittite Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i>
<i>ChS</i>	<i>Corpus der hurritischen Sprachdenkmäler</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
Chr	Chronicles
<i>COS</i>	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . 3 vols. Edited by W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger. Leiden: Brill, 2003
<i>CTH</i>	<i>Catalogue des textes hittites</i>

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- DCH* *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Edited by D. J. A. Clines. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993
- DDD* *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. Edited by K. van der Toorn et al. Leiden: Brill, 1999
- EA El-Amarna
- GBH* *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. P. Joüon and T. Muraoka. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2006
- GKC* *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by W. Gesenius, E. Kautsch. Trans. by A. Cowley. Oxford 1983
- GLH* *Glossaire de la langue houritte*. E. Laroche. *RHA* 34–35 (1976–1977)
- HALOT* *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. W. Baumgartner et al. Leiden: Brill, 1994
- HAT Handbuch zum Alten Testament
- Heb Hebrew
- HED* *Hittite Etymological Dictionary*. Jaan Puhvel. Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 1984–
- HEG* *Hethitisches Etymologisches Glossar*. J. Tischler. Innsbruck, 1977–
- HSS Harvard Semitic Studies
- HUCA* *Hebrew Union College Annual*
- Hur. Hurrian
- HW* *Hethitisches Wörterbuch*. J. Friedrich. Heidelberg, 1952
- HW²* *Hethitisches Wörterbuch*. J. Friedrich-A. Kammenhuber. Heidelberg: Winter, 1975–
- ICC International Critical Commentary
- IDB* *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, 1962
- IEJ* *Israel Exploration Journal*
- JANER* *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religion*
- JANES* *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*
- JAOS* *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
- JBL* *Journal of Biblical Literature*
- JCS* *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
- JHS* *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
- JIES* *Journal of Indo-European Studies*
- JNES* *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
- JNSL* *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
- JPS Jewish Publication Society
- JSOTSup Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
- KBo* *Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköy*

KHC	Kurzer Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
KUB	<i>Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköy</i>
LXX	Septuagint
<i>m.</i>	Mishna
MT	Masoretic Text
NABU	<i>N.A.B.U.—Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires</i>
NA	Neo-Assyrian
NB	Neo-Babylonian
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTT	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
OB	Old Babylonian
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OTL	Old Testament Library
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
RGTC	<i>Répertoire Géographique des Textes Cunéiformes</i>
RA	<i>Revue d'Assyriologie et Archéologie orientale</i>
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RHA	<i>Revue Hittite et Asiatique</i>
RIA	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie</i>
RS	Ras Shamra
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SB	Standard Babylonian
SCCNH	Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians
SMEA	<i>Studi micenei ed egeo-anatolici</i>
StBoT	Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten
StMed	<i>Studia Mediterranea</i>
Sum	Sumerian
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G.J. Botterweck et al.; trans. J. T. Wills and D. E. Green; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977–2006
THeth	Texte der Hethiter
TLOT	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by E. Jenni and C. Westermann; trans. M. E. Biddle; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
Weiss	<i>Sipra with Rabad's Commentary</i> . Edited by I. M. Weiss. New York: OM, 1946
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>

<i>ZA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>
<i>ZVS</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung</i>

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

All translations of Hittite or biblical texts are my own unless otherwise stated, though I have benefited from available translations and commentaries. Regarding Biblical texts, I have most consistently consulted the JPS translation and Milgrom's commentary on Leviticus.

INTRODUCTION

This study is about rituals and meaning. In modern academic research, it has become increasingly dangerous to mention these two terms in one breath. As will be shown in due course, the growing skepticism towards the notion of ritual meaning in current studies of ritual is an inevitable result of their tendency to treat its functions in highly abstract terms (e.g., as representative of social groupings or cognitive categories). In contrast, the present study seeks to determine the meaning of ritual in its concrete sociohistorical context. This approach is particularly appropriate for the rituals of the ancient Near East, which are most directly concerned with the needs of material existence, such as plague, illness, famine, infertility and the like.

In particular, this study examines the use of blood to purge the effects of sin and impurity in Hittite and biblical ritual. The idea that blood atones for sins holds a prominent place in both Jewish and Christian traditions. The present study traces this notion back to its earliest documentation. Our point of departure is the discovery of a set of rites documented in Hittite texts from the fourteenth to thirteenth centuries B.C.E., in which the smearing of blood is used as a means of expiation, purification,¹ and consecration. This rite parallels, in both its procedure and goals, the biblical sin offering. Expanding upon a proposal of the Hittitologist Volkert Haas, I will argue that this practice stems from a common tradition manifested in both cultures. In addition, this study aims to discover and elucidate the symbolism of this practice by seeking to identify the sociocultural context in which the expiatory significance of blood originated.

The first part of this study focuses on the relationship between the Hittite and Israelite sources. In order to understand the purpose of these rites properly, the texts from each culture are analyzed independently. In addition to analyzing the biblical texts in their canonical form, I will attempt to differentiate between

1. By the terms “expiation” and “purification” I am referring to processes for the removal of the effects of sin and ritual defilement, respectively. I will have more to say about these terms in depth later (see chapters 5–7).

earlier and later layers of the text, so as to trace the literary development of these sources and identify changing conceptions of the purpose of the sin offering.

The analysis of Hittite and Israelite sources leads to the identification of profound similarities in procedure, rationale, and circumstances of the rituals, only some of which will be mentioned in this overview. For example, the blood rites in both cultures consist of an act of smearing blood on an object, frequently cultic, as a means of removing metaphysical threats, such as sin and impurity, which will evoke divine retribution unless action is taken. The Hurro-Hittite blood rite—the *zurki*—is regularly accompanied by an offering of cooked fat, often from the same animal, called the *uzi* rite. This practice is strikingly similar to the sin offering, which involved the smearing and sprinkling of blood as well as the burning of its fat on the altar as a “pleasing aroma to YHWH” (Lev 4:31). Furthermore, the underlying dynamic of the Hittite and Israelite rituals are extraordinarily similar. In a dynamic that could be classified as form of metonymy, the ritual patron benefits from the expiatory rite by means of an associative connection between himself and the object. Moreover, the circumstances that require the performance of these rituals are nearly identical for both cultures, including expiation for unintentional sin, purification of a defiled temple, and the consecration of a new cult structure.

These striking parallels create a strong impression that the Hittite and Israelite blood rites stem from a common origin. This assumption is subjected to critical evaluation in ch. 3, where several additional points are raised in support of this conclusion. In particular, a comparison of blood rites from neighboring cultures from the ancient Near East and Mediterranean reveals that the latter differ from the Hittite and Israelite rites in their procedure and rationale. In further support of a common tradition, evidence is brought demonstrating the transfer of ritual traditions between the various ethnic groups of the Late Bronze Age Levant. Finally, an analysis of additional Hittite and biblical texts demonstrates the existence of parallels that extend beyond the blood rites themselves, narrowly defined.

The second part of this study attempts to reveal how the expiatory use of blood originated. In ch. 4, after outlining a theoretical critique of several dominant trends in the study of ritual symbolism, I argue that the function of rituals signs is not *arbitrary* but *motivated* by a sociohistorical context in which the relation between a sign and its function was understood as self-evident. This premise serves as a guideline for the subsequent analysis of the Hittite and biblical textual data of both cultures, revealing in both cases a relationship between the expiatory function of blood and beliefs associated with bloodguilt and revenge. In particular, an analysis of the relevant idioms in Hittite and Hebrew (*šarnink-* and *kipper*, respectively) reveals a pervasive belief in the necessity for making compensation for bloodguilt in order to avoid the imminent threat of

divine retribution. Within this social context, blood served as a means of making restitution for guilt. This dynamic could then serve as a model for addressing other types of offenses vis-à-vis the gods, which were conceptualized in terms of a metaphorical scheme of guilt as debt.

If the two parts of the study are similar to parallel strands, one focusing primarily on historical questions and the other on symbolism, these lines of inquiry finally converge in ch. 7. This chapter seeks to tie the loose ends and view some of the conclusions of the earlier chapters in a broader perspective. Specifically, it addresses questions pertaining to the origins of the blood rite and its transmission to Israel. Furthermore, it discusses the ramifications of our findings for modern critical theories of the Priestly source of the Bible. It also discusses the role of the sin offering's symbolism in shaping later Jewish and Christian metaphoric notions of sin and atonement and draws some fundamental conclusions regarding the relationship between the meaning and efficacy of ritual.