

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

self treated the sinners as the prodigal was treated by his father; the Pharisees treated them as the prodigal was treated by his brother; and what Jesus wishes us to feel is that everything human and divine is on His side. To digress into a comparison of the brothers is to put the whole parable out of focus, it is to do something in which we get no help from Jesus, and to make the one fatal mistake an interpreter can make. If there is anything to say about the brothers at all, which is in keeping with the parable, it is what I once heard felicitously put by John McNeill in a sermon—The father went out for them both.

JAMES DENNEY.

PRIVATE SACRIFICES BEFORE THE JEWISH DAY OF ATONEMENT

IN the *EXPOSITOR* for June, 1911, on p. 495 ff., Professor Eerdmans referred to private sacrifices offered by the Jews on the Day of Atonement in addition to the official sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus xvi. He pointed out "that the Old Testament did not mention these private sacrifices, but that the Rabbinical literature informed us about a custom of 'beating Kapporeth,' that is sacrificing a white cock."

While not going into the interesting conclusions of the learned professor from the statement quoted, I may be permitted to draw his attention to the rather late date of the Jewish custom referred to. Not only none of the earlier Rabbinic writings of the first and the second centuries knows anything of the sacrifice; but not even the Palestinian and the Babylonian Talmuds and the numerous works of Midrash, covering at least three centuries down to 500, betray any trace of it. It is only in the Responsa of the Gaons, the heads of the rabbinic high schools in Sura and

Pumbeditha, between 850 and 1038 that the earliest reference to the Kapparah on the day preceding the Day of Atonement is found.¹ The Responsa concerned are all anonymous, but one is quoted as emanating from Gaon Hai (998-1038) of Pumbeditha, another could possibly be attributed to Gaon Natronai of Sura (857-866). They report a custom of killing cocks on the day before the Day of Atonement. A white cock was recommended by Isaac Luria in the sixteenth century on cabbalistic grounds. Considering these facts, there is so far no justification for Professor Eerdmans' assumption of private sacrifices of the Jews in Palestine in the times of the Temple in Jerusalem. It is not even known from where the question about the prevailing custom to kill cocks on the day mentioned was addressed to the scholars; and there is no information available whether the Jews in Palestine ever knew the usage at or after the time when it was discussed by the scholars in Babylon.

Wherever the custom of killing a cock on the day before the Day of Atonement was first adopted by Jews, it would be of special interest to ascertain from whom they borrowed the, no doubt, heathen usage. Jewish sources do not even indicate this, and only suggestions of some probability can be derived from references to sacrificing cocks in Semitic countries. It is certainly not a genuine Jewish custom. For it is well known that the Jewish law allowed no birds except pigeons and turtledoves to be sacrificed on the altar in Jerusalem. It is true, the Karaites maintain that the cock was actually offered.² But, from their arguments, it is clear that they invented it in order to disprove the rule of their founder 'Anan that only such animals were permitted for food as clean as were fit for a sacrifice

¹ See *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. Kapparah.

² See Harkavy, *Liqqutê Qadmoniyoth*, ii, 67, 145, 154.

in the Temple, therefore not the cock and the hen. To Galilee points the prohibition in the Mishnah, most probably by Rabbi Meir, and the qualification of the prohibition by his colleague R. Yehudah, to sell a white cock to heathens, because they offer such to their idols.¹ It is, however, not certain whether those rabbis of the middle of the second century, in these statements, referred to native Palestinian heathens, or to Greeks and Romans in the Hellenistic cities in and around Galilee. The statement of the rabbis that the Cuthaeans worshipped a cock,² derived perhaps from the name Nergal in II. Reg. 17, 30 and from observations in heathen Samaria, cannot decide the question.³ In any case, it is most improbable that the Galilean Jews should have adopted the custom of sacrificing a cock from non-Jews in Galilee in the times of the Mishnah and of the Palestinian Talmud. For, in that case, the rabbis would not have failed to denounce in strong terms the heathen character of it, just as some rabbis did in Spain in the thirteenth century.

The custom probably belongs to post-Talmudic times and was adopted by some Jews living in a country where heathen worship continued in the sixth and following centuries. It is certain that the cock was sacrificed mainly by peoples to which it was sacred, as representing some god. It seems to have been a solar symbol in the worship of Baal,⁴ as it was in the temple in Mabug in Syria the announcer of Baal's oracle.⁵ Also the Harranians frequently offered cocks to their gods,⁶ because the cock was

¹ *Cabodah zarah*, i. 5.

² b. Sanhedrin 63, b.

³ Cf. Scholz, *Götzendienst*, 394.

⁴ Delitzsch on Job xxxviii. 36, *Hastings' Encyclopedia of Religion*, iii. 695 ff.

⁵ Lucian, *De dea Syria*, 48.

⁶ Chwolson, *Die Ssabier*, ii. 87.

under the influence of the sun. Galilee, Syria and Harrân represent in this the ancient worship of the Baal; but in those reports there is no trace of a sacrifice of atonement which was the peculiar characteristic of the Jewish offering.

A responsum by one of the heads of the schools in Sura or Pumbeditha in Babylonia,¹ probably by Gaon Hai, reports another form of atonement ten days before the Day of Atonement. The author in explaining the difficult word *Porpisa* used by Babylonian rabbis, says: "People make baskets of palm branches, and fill them with earth and manure, twenty-two or fifteen days before the new year; everybody sows in them on behalf of all children, male and female, Egyptian beans and peas, and call it *Porpisa*. On the day before the New Year everybody takes his own basket and swings it around his head seven times and says: "This is in exchange for me, this is a substitute for me," and throws it into the river. This reminds one of the gardens of Adonis,² but has no parallel as atonement in that worship. Though several improbable derivations from Greek words have been suggested,³ the names of those rabbis of the Babylonian school make it certain that it was either a Persian or a Babylonian custom prevailing in Pumbeditha in the fourth century. The similarity of the sacrifice of a cock suggests the same country as place of its origin and of its continued practice.

Just as late as that sacrifice is the other custom referred to by Professor Eerdmans of revoking the religious vows of last year on the eve of the Day of Atonement. Before the ninth century nobody seemed to know of it, and the head of the school in Sura, Gaon Natronai (857-866), in a responsum on the usage, says: Neither in the two schools

¹ Quoted by Rashib in his commentary to b. Sabbath, 81b.

² Fleischer in *Levy's Dictionary*, iv. 229a.

³ Krauss, *Lehnwörter*, ii. 494.

nor in Babylonia does a similar custom exist either on the New Year or on the Day of Atonement. Our fathers never observed it; but we know that it has spread in many countries.¹ It is, consequently, against all evidence to use it for illustrating the beliefs and the sacrifices of the time of the Temple.

A. BÜCHLER.

THE ODES OF SOLOMON: CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS.

III.

IN the two preceding articles the effort has been made so to characterize the poet of the Odes of Solomon by his salient and pervasive ideas that we may relate them on the one side to admittedly antecedent ideas in the literature of later Judaism, and on the other compare them with the elements which appear to be Christian. Of the latter we have two groups: (1) passages such as Ode 19 and the latter part of Ode 42, which are generally conceded to be interpolated; (2) passages whose authenticity is disputed, and which afford no other criterion of their origin than their agreement or disagreement (*a*) with their immediate context, and (*b*) with the conceptions and style of the Odist.

As an example of the class of admitted, and indeed almost self-evident, interpolations we cannot do better than to reproduce Ode 19, differentiating typographically the two poetic lines which seem to form the authentic basis from the prose addition.

ODE 19.

¹ A cup of milk was offered me
and I drank it in the sweetness of the delight of the Lord.

² The Son is the cup, and He who was milked is the Father:
³ and the Holy Spirit milked Him: because His breasts were full,

¹ See *Revue des Études Juives*, xxxix. 1899, p. 77 ff.