
*Blood and the Boundaries of Jewish and Christian Identities
in Late Antiquity*
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with the American Editorial Board)

INTRODUCTION TO THEME-ISSUE:
BLOOD AND THE BOUNDARIES OF JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN
IDENTITIES IN LATE ANTIQUITY*

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What makes Jews different from Christians, and Christians different from Jews? Are there boundaries between the two religions that simply cannot be crossed, except by abandoning one set of allegiances for the other? What elements (if any) made Jewish and Christian identities irreconcilable with one another, already in Late Antiquity?

The symbolic vocabulary of blood often figures heavily in the common answers to such questions, as offered both by modern historians and by premodern theologians; for, indeed, blood plays a constitutive role in the projects of boundary-drawing and boundary-maintenance reflected already in the classic texts of both Judaism and Christianity. By focusing on the ways in which biblical ideas about blood were reinterpreted, reapplied, and re-imagined in Late Antiquity, this theme-issue of *Henoch* will explore the dynamics of Jewish and Christian self-definition, their parallels and points of contact, and their relationship to the broader range of reflections about the nature and power of blood in the ancient Mediterranean world. Accordingly, special attention will be paid to possible Christian responses to Jewish positions (real or imagined) and the converse – as well as to the

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common assumptions and concerns that late antique Jews and Christians shared with their “pagan” contemporaries.

1. *Blood and Difference*

Already in the book of Genesis, the chosenness of Israel is articulated with appeal to God’s covenant with Abraham, as cut in the blood of sacrifice (Gen 15:5-11) and circumcision (Gen 17:9-14).¹ In Exodus, the imagery of blood at the boundaries of religious identity is concretized, as Hebrews mark themselves protected and distinct by smearing their lintels with the blood of lambs (Exod 12). Likewise is the Sinaitic covenant ratified, for all those made Israelites in the Wilderness, by the sprinkling of blood by Moses upon his people (Exod 24:3-8).² Forbidden for human consumption, emblemizing life, and belonging to God alone (e.g., Gen 9:4-5; Lev 7:26-27; 17:10-14; Deut 12:23-25), blood becomes the powerful cleansing agent that grants efficacy to the sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple, purifying what is ritually defiled and atoning for moral transgressions.³ Even after the Temple fell, ancient Israelite beliefs about the protective, purificatory, and atoning power of blood remained resonant and powerful, embedded in genealogical and ethnic approaches to Jewish chosenness, as vouchsafed by the blood passed from mother to child, connecting past and present, generation and generation.⁴

¹ On the subsequent development of the symbolic significance of the blood of circumcision within Judaism, see L.A. Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996); S.J.D. Cohen, *Why Aren’t Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005), esp. pp. 28-33, 52-53, 196-205; idem, “A Brief History of Jewish Circumcision Blood,” in *The Covenant of Circumcision: New Perspectives on an Ancient Jewish Rite*, ed. E.W. Mark (Hanover: Brandeis University, 2003), pp. 30-42; and Martha Himmelfarb’s article in this theme-issue. On Christian understandings of circumcision, see A.S. Jacobs, “Dialogic Differences: (De-)Judaizing Jesus’ Circumcision,” *J ECS* 15 (2007), pp. 291-335, as well as his contribution to this theme-issue.

² On Jewish and Christian exegesis of Exod 24:3-8, see now D. Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley: University of California, 2007), pp. 47-80.

³ E.g., Exod 29:20-21; 30:10; Lev 5:9; 8:15; 14:49-52; 16:14-19. On the meanings of blood within the Hebrew Bible and ancient Israelite religion, see esp. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), pp. 12-18, 31-32, 85-86, 104-106, 184-92; W.K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2004); M. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999), esp. pp. 67-75. Perhaps the most striking Second Temple Jewish continuation and extension of the biblical discourse about blood occurs in *Jubilees*, on which see W.K. Gilders, “Blood and Covenant: Interpretive Elaboration on Genesis 9.4-6 in the Book of Jubilees,” *JSP* 15 (2006), pp. 83-118; M. Himmelfarb, *A Kingdom of Priests: Ancestry and Merit in Ancient Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2006), pp. 61-66.

⁴ Ancient Israelite beliefs about blood prove particularly striking due to the lack of similar traditions among their ancient Near Eastern neighbors; see D.J. McCarthy, “The

Just as ethnicity and the blood of circumcision are widely accepted as distinguishing marks that separate Jews from Gentiles, so it is often said that key markers of Christian identity include an inverse and opposite set of beliefs concerning blood. Such beliefs center on the death of Jesus – conceived as sacrifice and as model for martyrdom but also as an act of deicide generating Jewish blood-guilt. In the New Testament, references to the death of Jesus are rich with sacrificial imagery: Jesus is likened to sin-offering⁵ and Paschal lamb,⁶ and the ritual remembrance of his death is prescribed in terms resonant with the rituals of Temple sacrifice (e.g., Matt 26:28: “*this* is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”).⁷ Just as those who practice such rituals are depicted as embracing the proper continuation of Temple worship and/or as becoming a new chosen people constituted by a new understanding of sacrificial blood, so those who imitate Jesus – whether through embrace of

Symbolism of Blood and Sacrifice,” *JBL* 88 (1969), pp. 166-176, and discussion below. On the early modern and contemporary discourse about blood and Jewish identity, see Biale, *Blood and Belief*, pp. 123-206; J. Friedman, “Jewish Conversion, the Spanish Pure Blood Laws and Reformation: A Revisionist View of Racial and Religious Antisemitism,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987), pp. 3-30; E.L. Goldstein, “Different Blood Flows in Our Veins: Race and Jewish Self-Definition in Late Nineteenth Century America,” *American Jewish History* 85 (1997), pp. 29-55; S.A. Glenn, “In the Blood? Consent, Descent, and the Ironies of Jewish Identity,” *Jewish Social Studies* 8 (2002), pp. 139-152.

⁵ E.g., Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10. On Paul’s use of sacrificial imagery, see further J.D.G. Dunn, “Paul’s Understanding of the Death of Jesus as Sacrifice,” in *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology*, ed. S. Sykes (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991), pp. 35-56; S. Finlan, *The Background and Content of Paul’s Cultic Atonement Metaphors* (Academia Biblica 19; Atlanta: SBL, 2004). On the debate over whether or not Paul understood Jesus’ death as an atoning sacrifice, see also B.H. McLean, “The Absence of an Atoning Sacrifice in Paul’s Soteriology,” *NTS* 38 (1992), pp. 531-553; C. Breytenbach, “Versöhnung, Stellvertretung und Sühne: Semantische und traditionsgeschichtliche Bemerkungen am Beispiel der paulinischen Briefe,” *NTS* 39 (1993), pp. 58-79; A.L.A. Hogeterp, *Paul and God’s Temple: A Historical Interpretation of Cultic Imagery in the Corinthian Correspondence* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006).

⁶ E.g., 1 Cor 5:7; John 1:29, 36; 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 5. In the case of Revelation, the depiction of Jesus as slaughtered lamb is paired with a striking concern for issues of ritual purity, on which see D. Frankfurter, “Jews or Not? Reconstructing the ‘Other’ in Rev 2:9 and 3:9,” *HTR* 94 (2001), pp. 403-425. On the early Christian redeployment of Paschal imagery and practices, see Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 40; 111; Melito, *Peri Pascha*; A. Stewart-Sykes, *The Lamb’s High Feast: Melito, Peri Pascha, and the Quartodeciman Paschal at Sardis* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

⁷ See also Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:18-19; John 6:53-58; 1 Cor 10:16; 11:25-27. The Last Supper, Eucharist, and attitudes towards the Temple in the Jesus Movement are discussed, e.g., in B.D. Chilton, *A Feast of Meanings: Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus through Johannine Circles* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); idem, “Eucharist: Surrogate, Metaphor, Sacrament of Sacrifice,” in *Sacrifice in Religious Experience*, ed. A.I. Baumgarten (SHR 93; Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 175-188; B. Lang, “This is My Body: Sacrificial Presentation and the Origins of Christian Ritual,” *Sacrifice in Religious Experience*, pp. 189-206; J. Klawans, “Interpreting the Last Supper: Sacrifice, Spiritualization, and Anti-Sacrifice,” *NTS* 48 (2002), pp. 1-17.

his teachings and/or through martyrdom – claim the status of a new Temple and new priesthood.⁸

Some New Testament authors/redactors make explicit appeals to blood to delineate the boundaries between the Jesus Movement and other Jews.⁹ Already in the Gospel of Matthew, the hands of Jews are deemed stained with the blood of their prophets (Matt 23:35; cf. Luke 11:49-51), and in the mouth of a Jewish crowd is placed the acceptance of guilt for the death of the one who is held to be their own messiah (“his blood be upon us!”; Matt 27:25).¹⁰ The Epistle to the Hebrews goes even further: as both sacrificer and sacrificed, Jesus is likened to – and elevated above – the Aaronid high priest (Heb 9:6-12) as well as the Temple sacrifices (9:13-14).¹¹ By means of his death, the sins of all humankind are said to be cleansed,¹² and the

⁸ E.g., Rom 12:1; 1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 5:1-2; Phil 2:17; 1 Pet 2:4-5; Rev 1:6; 3:12; 5:10; 20:6. In this, the Jesus Movement can be likened to the Qumran community, which similarly seems to have reinterpreted beliefs and practices related to Temple sacrifice in the service of the understanding of the community as the true Israel, the elect, and/or the “righteous remnant”; see L.H. Schiffman, “Community without Temple: The Qumran Community’s Withdrawal from the Jerusalem Temple,” in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel-Community without Temple*, ed. B. Ego, et al. (WUNT 118; Tübingen: Mohr, 1999), pp. 267-284; F. García Martínez, “Priestly Functions in a Community without Temple,” *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, pp. 303-322; E. Regev, “Abominated Temple and a Holy Community: The Formation of the Notions of Purity and Impurity in Qumran,” *DSD* 10 (2003), pp. 243-278; J. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), pp. 134-138, 145-174.

⁹ Less discussed but arguably no less significant for the self-definition of the Jesus Movement is the contrast with “pagan” views of blood and sacrifice. This concern comes through most clearly in debates about whether or not followers of Jesus are permitted to eat meat offered to idols (e.g., 1 Cor 8:1-13; 10:18-29; Acts 15:29; 21:25; Rev 2:14, 20) – an issue that seems to have remained distinct from the related question of whether Gentile followers of Jesus are required to keep the Jewish dietary laws (Acts 10:10-16; 15:28-29). Especially significant, for our purposes, are strictures against the consumption of blood (Acts 15:29; 21:25), which stand in direct continuity with both biblical and Second Temple Jewish understandings of the avoidance of consuming blood as a mark of separation from Gentile/“pagan” practices. See further P.D. Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8-10 in its Context* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 5; Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier, 1993). On the celebration of Eucharist with bread and water by some early Christians, in the context of resistance to wine and meat as emblems of “pagan” culture and worship, see A.B. McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999).

¹⁰ On Matthew’s connection between Jewish blood-guilt and salvation through the blood of Jesus, see, e.g., J.P. Heil, “The Blood of Jesus in Matthew: A Narrative-Critical Perspective,” *PRSt* 18 (1991), pp. 117-124.

¹¹ Esp. W. Horbury, “The Aaronic Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *JSNT* 19 (1983), pp. 43-71.

¹² Strikingly, the Epistle to the Hebrews appears to affirm levitical beliefs in the purificatory power of blood – namely, that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb 9:22). Here, Jesus is thus described as the sacrifice to end all sacrifices: “for if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the

Jewish sacrificial system superseded (10:4-9, 18-20). With this blood, the Sinaitic covenant is declared to be annulled, and a new covenant cut and sealed (9:11-22; 10:9; 12:24; 13:20). Accordingly, in some early Christian writings, the sacrament of the Eucharist is understood *both* as the ritual memorialization of Jesus' death *and* as an act akin to sacrifice¹³ – claims that resonate with alleged “pagan” accusations of Christian ritual murder and cannibalism.¹⁴

Contrary to the common assumption that Christians simply “spiritualized” biblical prescriptions concerning the Temple and ritual purity,¹⁵ there are numerous examples of Christian writings that draw on ancient Israelite beliefs concerning the unique potency of blood – particularly in their discussions about martyrdom, on the one hand, and about Jews and Judaism, on the other. At the same time that the deaths of persecuted Christians were being assimilated to the conceptual framework of sacrifice, as atoning and purificatory acts in imitation of Christ,¹⁶

blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!” (Heb 9:13-14).

¹³ The Eucharist, for instance, was variously likened to the thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being (e.g., *Didache* 9-10; cf. Lev 7:12-15), to the offering of fine flour on behalf of lepers (e.g., Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 41; cf. Lev 14:10), and to the grain offering of first-fruits (e.g., Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.17.4-8.6; cf. Lev 2:14). Notably, the sacrificial character of the Eucharist was often affirmed in debates against so-called “heretics” who denied both the bodily suffering of Jesus and the efficacy of Eucharistic ritual (e.g., Ignatius, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 7; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 5.2.1-3). Justin similarly argues that it is the Eucharist of the Christians, rather than the prayers of the Jews, that represent the true continuation of sacrifice and the proper replacement for the ritual slaughter of animals in the Temple (*Dial.* 117).

¹⁴ E.g., Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 9.6; Athenagoras, *Legatio Pro Christianis* 35; Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 3.4; Tertullian, *Apology* 7.1-9.20. On the broader context of such claims – as “part of a complex and wide-ranging Graeco-Roman discourse about civilization and religion” – see J. Rives, “Human Sacrifice among Pagans and Christians,” *JRS* 85 (1995), pp. 65-85.

¹⁵ To be sure, some early Christian authors promoted explicitly “spiritualizing” readings of biblical assertions about blood; on Origen, for instance, see R.J. Daly, “Sacrifice in Origen,” *StPatr* 11 (1972), pp. 125-129. Nevertheless, modern scholars have vastly oversimplified the range and complexity of the strategies deployed within Christian discourse to adapt and adopt the imagery – and practices – of blood found within biblical tradition. See the thorough-going critique of the scholarly tendency to see “spiritualization” as the dominant approach to the Temple and its sacrifice in post-Temple Judaism as well as early Christianity in Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, esp. pp. 213-246. Important examples of the older approach include H. Wenschkewitz, “Die Spiritualisierung der Kultusbegriffe Tempel, Priester und Opfer im Neuen Testament,” *Angelos* 4 (1932), pp. 70-230; R. Daly, *Christian Sacrifice: The Judaeo-Christian Background before Origen* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1978); idem, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); E. Ferguson, “Spiritual Sacrifice in Early Christianity and its Environment,” *ANRW* 2.23.2 (1980), pp. 1152-1189.

¹⁶ On the use of sacrificial language in the early Christian discourse of martyrdom, especially regarding the atoning and purificatory function of the martyrs' blood, see E.A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia

polemics against animal sacrifice, accusations of deicide, and punitive interpretations of the Temple's destruction were becoming hallmarks of Christian anti-Judaism.¹⁷ Here, too, blood could function as a powerful marker of difference: Jews were disparaged as the ones who killed Christ, while Christians were those who recognize his death as atoning and who were willing, if necessary, to follow in his footsteps.

Seen from one perspective, then, Late Antiquity represents a critical era in the creation and consolidation of the discursive use of blood as a marker of Jewish and Christian difference. Jewish and Christian beliefs about blood, forged in the wake of the Temple's destruction, continued to resonate in medieval and modern times. Rabbinic traditions about matrilineal descent and endogamous marriage, for instance, shaped all subsequent views of Jewish identity, both by enshrining a select set of biblical and Second Temple traditions within Jewish practice and by innovating new understandings of Jewish peoplehood.¹⁸ Moreover, as David Biale has recently shown, blood continued to bear special power as a marker of Jewish difference: just as medieval Jews appealed to the blood of circumcision and the blood of the martyr to assert their identities within Christian cultural milieus, so blood is also a recurrent theme in Christian anti-Judaism and modern anti-Semitism – from “blood purity” laws that excluded Jews to accusations of blood libel and the myth of Jewish male menstruation.¹⁹ That the blood of Jesus remained central to the negotiation of Christian identity is equally clear from its prominent place in inner-Christian controversy; the appeal to blood was pivotal, for instance, in debates about the precise nature of Christ's incarnation, bodily resurrection, and the Eucharist.²⁰ The continued power of these issues, even now, is

University, 2004), pp. 50-61. Note, however, that the purificatory power of the blood of martyrs is likely not, strictly speaking, a specifically Christian innovation, as it is also found in 4 Maccabees (6:29; 17:21-22) and perhaps hinted at already in the account of Razis' death in 2 Maccabees (14:45-46), on which see J.W. van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (JSJSup 57; Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 140-156.

¹⁷ E.g., Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 22; 40; Melito, *Peri Pascha* 44-45; 72-99; Tertullian, *Answer to the Jews* 5; 7.

¹⁸ On the emergence of matrilineal descent as guarantor for Jewish “ethnicity,” see S.J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), pp. 263-340. And on ideas of genealogical purity in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Jewish discourse on intermarriage and Gentile impurity, see C.E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (New York: Oxford University, 2002).

¹⁹ Biale, *Blood and Belief*, esp. pp. 81-206.

²⁰ Early examples include Ignatius, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 6-7; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 5.2.2-3. On Marcion and Tertullian, see Jennifer Glancy's contribution to this theme-issue. On later debates see, most recently, C. Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007), esp. pp. 83-192.

perhaps clear from the fact that accusations of deicide still spark controversy,²¹ blood libel is a topic of fierce and fresh debate,²² and any assertion that the historical Jesus might have died a normal death, buried in an ordinary grave, is received by some as a possible threat to Christian faith.²³

2. *The Late Antique Discourse about Blood*

To be sure, we can learn much about Jewish and Christian history through a focus on the place of blood in the differentiation of Jews from Gentiles, and Christians from Jews. What may be effaced in the emphasis on difference, however, is the participation of Jews, Christians, and “pagans” in a shared discourse about blood in Late Antiquity. Blood may have served as a powerful marker of religious difference in Late Antiquity *precisely because* it was also a charged site for discursive contact, ritual contestation, and exegetical competition.²⁴ Although the appeal to blood as an emblem of shared genealogy is typically considered a mark of Jewish collective identity, for instance, recent research has drawn new attention to the importance of “ethnic reasoning” within the formation of Christian identities.²⁵ Likewise, late antique Christian claims about the supersession of Temple sacrifice are perhaps best approached as one set of voices in a broader conversation about blood and sacrifice, in which rabbinic sages and Neoplatonic philosophers participated as well.²⁶

²¹ E.g., Z. Garber (ed.), “Special Section: Mel Gibson’s *Passion: The Film, the Controversy, and Its Implications*,” *Shofar* 23 (2005), pp. 71-143; P. Fredriksen (ed.), *On ‘The Passion of the Christ’: Exploring the Issues Raised by the Controversial Movie* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005).

²² Most recently: the controversy surrounding the publication of A. Toaff, *Pasque di sangue: Ebrei d’Europa e omicidi rituali* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007).

²³ Note, e.g., debates surrounding the Talpiot tomb, the claims for which are discussed in S. Jacobovici – C.R. Pellegrino, *The Jesus Family Tomb: The Discovery, the Investigation, and the Evidence That Could Change History* (New York: Harper, 2007); J.D. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006). For our purposes, the question of the identification of these tombs proves less relevant than the charged nature of the discussion itself.

²⁴ Seen from this perspective, for instance, it is perhaps not surprising that recent critiques of traditional views of the “Parting of the Ways” were initiated by a study of martyrdom – namely, D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1999).

²⁵ Esp. D.K. Buell, *Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University, 2005); A.P. Johnson, “Identity, Descent, and Polemic: Ethnic Argumentation in Eusebius’ *Praeparatio Evangelica*,” *J ECS* 12 (2004), pp. 23-56.

²⁶ I.e., as richly explored in G.G. Stroumsa, *La Fin du Sacrifice: Les Mutations Religieuses de l’Antiquité Tardive* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2005). See also Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, pp. 195-248, which traces the powerful, though often neglected, role that the blood of sacrifice continued to play within Christian discourse and practice well into the late Middle Ages.

Just as New Testament traditions about Jesus' atoning death can profitably be read as part of a continuum of Jewish responses to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE,²⁷ so late antique Jews and Christians arguably shared the challenge of re-interpreting sacrificial imagery, priestly status, and levitical law in the absence of the physical Jerusalem Temple.²⁸ Recent studies have also shown how late antique rabbis innovated new approaches to the ritual replacement and exegetical displacement of sacrificial blood rites, in a manner not unlike their patristic contemporaries.²⁹ And, perhaps not coincidentally, "pagan" elites were similarly struggling anew, in the first five centuries of the Common Era, with questions about blood, animal slaughter, and the mechanics of sacrificial efficacy.³⁰

In our view, this outpouring of theoretical discourse about blood may index some of the broader sociological and cultural changes that characterize the period of Late Antiquity. Prior to this period, animal sacrifice had constituted the dominant mode of public religious expression within eastern Mediterranean societies for over a millennium; sacrifice had also been a central mechanism for the distribution of protein in "sacrificial communities."³¹ Yet, during Late Antiquity, communities throughout the

²⁷ See further D.M. Moffitt, "Righteous Bloodshed, Matthew's Passion Narrative, and the Temple's Destruction: Lamentations as a Matthean Intertext," *JBL* 125 (2006), pp. 299-320; A. Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John* (JSNTSup 220; London: Sheffield, 2002); A.J. Köstenberger, "The Destruction of the Second Temple and the Composition of the Fourth Gospel," in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, ed. J. Lierman (WUNT² 219; Tübingen: Mohr, 2006), pp. 69-108.

²⁸ E.g., Himmelfarb, *Kingdom of Priests*, pp. 160-186; Stroumsa, *Fin du Sacrifice*, pp. 103-144; J.R. Branham, "Sacred Space under Erasure in Ancient Synagogues and Early Churches," *Art Bulletin* 74 (1992), pp. 375-394; A. Gregerman, "Have You Despised Jerusalem and Zion after You had Chosen Them?: The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in Jewish and Christian Writings from the Land of Israel in Late Antiquity" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2007).

²⁹ E.g., Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, pp. 175-211; B.L. Visotzky, *Golden Bells and Pomegranates: Studies in Midrash Leviticus Rabbah* (TSAJ 94; Tübingen: Mohr, 2003), esp. pp. 59-89; Daly, *Origins of the Christian Doctrine*; F.M. Young, *The Use of Sacrificial Ideas in Greek Christian Writers from the New Testament to John Chrysostom* (Philadelphia: Patristic, 1979).

³⁰ On the Neoplatonic defense of animal sacrifice, see esp. book 5 of Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*, and the discussion of this seminal text in J. Dillon, "Iamblichus' Defence of Theurgy: Some Reflections," *International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 1 (2007), pp. 30-41; also S. Bradbury, "Julian's Pagan Revival and the Decline of Blood Sacrifice," *Phoenix* 49 (1995), pp. 331-356; K.W. Harl, "Sacrifice and Pagan Belief in Fifth- and Sixth-Century Byzantium," *Past and Present* 128 (1990), pp. 7-27; Stroumsa, *Fin du Sacrifice*, pp. 103-144.

³¹ P. Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999). See also M. Detienne, "Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice," in *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, ed. M. Detienne – J.-P. Vernant, trans. P. Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), pp. 1-20; J.-L. Durand, "Greek Animals: Toward a Topology of Edible Bodies," in *Cuisine of Sacrifice*, pp. 87-118.

Mediterranean world gradually ceased to engage in animal sacrifice. Whatever the precise causes for this tectonic shift in religious practice, it seems to have played a part in the far-reaching process, famously noted by Peter Brown, whereby a mobile class of exceptional individuals came to eclipse the traditional temple cults as the locus of the holy.³² Similarly, Guy Stroumsa has proposed that the cessation of sacrifice formed part of the progressive “interiorization” of religious experience during Late Antiquity.³³

These historical phenomena resonate with anthropological insights into the function of blood as a marker of social boundaries. Anthropologists have long noted how the social organization and performative regime of sacrifice enacts and legitimates the social differences within a given community as well as marking the boundaries between that community and outsiders.³⁴ Working within this tradition of anthropological analysis, for instance, Nancy Jay has suggested that the blood of sacrifice serves as a particularly powerful symbolic medium for the reproduction of social systems of patrilineal descent in numerous cultures, both ancient and modern; in her view, sacrifice establishes and maintains the blood ties among the usually all-male guild of sacrificers, thereby superseding the bonds produced through women’s childbirth and the blood of parturition.³⁵ On this reading, the power of sacrificial blood is itself rooted in the (male) redeployment and supersession of the power of (female) blood. And, if so, it is perhaps not surprising that the rhetorics of blood could be so readily reinterpreted, and its power transferred and transformed, in the wake of the cessation of animal sacrifice in the Mediterranean world. Likewise, we might rightly expect that a decline in the practice of sacrifice would be accompanied by fresh efforts to grapple with the power of other types of blood (esp. female) and to develop new mechanisms for their control – as richly attested, for instance, in rabbinic and patristic discussions of the blood associated with menstruation, the loss of virginity, and childbirth.³⁶

³² P. Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), pp. 103-152; also J. Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), pp. 172-189.

³³ Stroumsa, *Fin du Sacrifice*, esp. pp. 23-60.

³⁴ See the now classic studies of M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Ark, 1966), and V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Hawthorne: Aldine de Gruyter, 1969).

³⁵ See N. Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992); eadem, “Sacrifice, Descent and the Patriarchs,” *VT* 38 (1988), pp. 52-70; eadem, “Sacrifice as Remedy for Having Been Born of Woman,” in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, ed. C.W. Atkinson – C.H. Buchanan – M.R. Miles (Boston: Beacon, 1985), pp. 283-309.

³⁶ Esp. C.E. Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2000), and her contribution in this theme-issue.

Is there anything, then, unique about Jewish and Christian discussions about blood and/or about the broader discourse of blood in the late antique Mediterranean world? Particularly in light of celebrated anthropological discussions of blood and other bodily fluids as “natural symbols,”³⁷ it might be tempting to approach our late antique sources merely as generic examples and expressions of blood’s “universal” power – as a substance, for instance, which can uniquely symbolize both death and life and which can paradoxically represent both the body and its boundaries. It is perhaps important to recall, however, that not all ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern forms of animal sacrifice placed equal emphasis on the symbolic power of blood.³⁸ In fact, the cultic systems of ancient Greeks and ancient Israelites seem to have been unusual in their intensive attention to the proper manipulation of blood in the sacrificial process.³⁹ Not least because of the rich afterlives of *both* “biblical” and “classical” literature in Late Antiquity, these twin perspectives on sacrificial blood seem to have had a definitive impact on the late antique discourse about blood. The literature of both traditions, for instance, preserve hints of a reaction against the attribution of power to sacrificial blood within cultic settings: the question of whether the slaughter of animals was the original and/or sole efficacious means for commerce with the divine was raised by Israelite prophets and Greek philosophers alike.⁴⁰ And, in Late Antiquity, the ritual empowerment of blood in these parallel discussions seems to have been powerfully re-imagined and transformed, concurrent with the development and extension of precisely such critiques.

Among the results of this historical process were new and lasting forms of piety – some of which continue to shape Western culture to this day. Although the enduring influence of the late antique discourse about blood has thus helped to naturalize the modern Western notion of blood as a

³⁷ Particularly influential, in this regard, is Douglas’ early work, e.g., *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Pelikan, 1973).

³⁸ On the marked contrast between the “blood-consciousness” characteristic of ancient Israelite sacrifice and the absence of such a consciousness in ancient Mesopotamia, see esp. T. Abusch, “Sacrifice in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Sacrifice in Religious Experience*, pp. 39-48, and the literature cited there.

³⁹ For a comparison of the blood-centered sacrificial systems of ancient Greece and Israel, see S.K. Stowers, “On the Comparison of Blood in Greek and Israelite Ritual,” in *Hesed ve-Emet: Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs*, ed. J. Magness – S. Gitin (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), pp. 179-188. On animal sacrifice in Greek religion see also F. Graf, “What is New about Greek Sacrifice?” in *Kykeon: Studies in Honour of H.S. Versnel*, ed. H.F.J. Horstmanshoff et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), esp. pp. 116-122.

⁴⁰ Such connections are noted, e.g., by W. Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. P. Bing (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), pp. 7-8. The *locus classicus* for the prophetic critique of sacrifice is Isa 1:11. Most notable among ancient Greek critiques are the views of Theophrastus (e.g., Porphyry, *De abstinence* 2.5-32); for recent discussion and references, see D.B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2004), pp. 21-35.

marker of identity and difference, it may not be possible fully to understand the dynamics of this discourse without also considering its distinctively *late antique* cultural, social, and historical contexts.

The value of such contextualization is suggested by recent insights into the fluidity of “natural symbols” like blood, milk, and semen. In recent years, anthropologists have pushed beyond the structural functionalism of Mary Douglas to raise fundamental questions about the constructed nature of the very substances whose “naturalness” we today most take for granted. This newer line of anthropological research refrains from treating bodily fluids simply as stable substances with essential natural properties that carry different symbolic meanings in different cultural contexts. After all, as historians of science have richly demonstrated, the definitions of these bodily fluids – the perceptions of their nature and the boundaries between them – remain surprisingly malleable, and even our modern views of bodily fluids are shaped by cultural and social factors, no less than scientific findings.⁴¹ When tracing the genealogy of physiological categories within the shifting epistemology of Western scientific discourses, for instance, Thomas Laqueur has thus observed:

Ancient medicine bequeathed to the Renaissance a physiology of flux and corporeal openness, one in which blood, mother’s milk, and semen were fungible fluids, products of the body’s power to concoct its nutriment. Thus, not only could women turn into men, as writers from Pliny to Montaigne testified, but bodily fluids could turn easily into one another.⁴²

Just as sexual identity is produced and mediated by culturally-specific historical and social processes, so too are the definitions and boundaries of “natural symbols” constructed. Accordingly, we may miss much when we approach blood simply as a biological substance or when we assume that its physical nature and physiological function were perceived in basically the same ways in different times and places. Rather, inquiries into late antique

⁴¹ In our view, some of the most important recent work in this tradition of research has focused on dynamic impact of new immunological, reproductive, and genetic technologies on the cultural practices of post-industrial societies. See esp. E. Martin, “Toward an Anthropology of Immunology: The Body as Nation State,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 4 (1990), pp. 410-426; eadem, “The Egg and The Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male–Female Roles,” *Signs* 16 (1991), pp. 485-501; eadem, *Flexible Bodies* (Boston: Beacon, 1994).

⁴² T. Laqueur, “Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology,” *Representations* 14 (1986), pp. 1-41, here 8. The relevance of this insight for our understanding of Late Antiquity is clear, e.g., from Tertullian’s otherwise puzzling assertion that “the blood of Christians is semen” (*Apology* 50.13); this belief and its connections to late antique embryology are richly discussed in B. Leyerle, “Blood Is Seed,” *JR* 81 (2001), pp. 26-48; on Tertullian’s view of the body and its fluids, see also Jennifer Glancy’s contribution to this theme-issue.

Jewish and Christian appeals to blood should be attuned to the specific complex of religious, social, and scientific valences of this substance within the particular cultural contexts in which our literary sources took form.

3. *Aims and Contents*

In this theme-issue of *Henoch*, we hope to use a focus on blood to illumine the formation of Jewish and Christian identities in Late Antiquity as well as their ongoing fluidities and intersections. Far from seeking to conflate Jewish and Christian approaches to blood or to collapse their differences, we seek to draw attention to the dynamics of their differentiation by specific Jewish and Christian authors working within particular cultural and social contexts. It is from this perspective that we investigate the commonalities informing their discussions of blood, as variously rooted in the scriptures shared by Jews and Christians, their contestation over ancient Israelite concepts of chosenness, and their common participation in late antique cultures – commonalities thus reproduced in these discussions, even despite their differences. Accordingly, our aim is not only to analyze the symbolic significance of blood for various groups within Judaism and Christianity; rather, we hope also to shed light on the social and cultural parameters within which these discussions of blood operated.

Through the selection and arrangement of the articles in this issue, we hope to draw attention to the ways in which blood marks defining moments in the life-cycles of gendered subjects, as such cycles were understood in late antique science and society. Accordingly, we begin with menstruation, continue with childbirth and circumcision, and conclude with death. In “Blood and Law: Uterine Fluids and Rabbinic Maps of Identity,” Charlotte Fonrobert extends her earlier work on the meanings of menstrual blood in rabbinic legal materials by considering how this substance serves as a discursive site for exploring and negotiating the precise boundaries of “Israel” as body politic, at least as understood by the rabbis, in imagined interaction with non-Jews, Samaritans, and Sadducees. Fonrobert thus demonstrates how mishnaic discussions of menstrual blood can shed light, not just on rabbinic constructions of gender, but also on rabbinic constructions of community more broadly; despite (or perhaps because of) the marginality of women in rabbinic culture, female bodies and bleeding function as a focus for broader articulations of identity.

With Jennifer Glancy’s contribution, we turn from Jewish traditions in the early third-century compilation of the Mishnah to debates about women’s blood among Christians of the same century. In “The Law of the Opened Body: Tertullian on the Nativity,” Glancy explores late antique views about the blood of childbirth through the lens of the writings of the Latin Christian author Tertullian. Glancy considers Tertullian’s surprisingly explicit appeals to the fluids associated with reproduction (including lochial

fluids, menstrual blood, semen, and mother's milk) in his discussions of the birth of Jesus; she suggests that his ambivalent attitudes towards blood are best understood in relation to Marcionite views of the shamefulness of the body, the comparably neutral views of bodily fluids found in the Greco-Roman medicinal tradition, and his own understanding of Christ's incarnation, as inextricable from the sordid materiality of human flesh and thus inseparable from its capacity for redemptive suffering.

The next two articles examine late antique views of male blood, considering the blood of circumcision from both Christian and Jewish perspectives. In "The Ordeals of Abraham: Circumcision and the Aqedah in Origen, the *Mekhilta*, and *Genesis Rabbah*," Martha Himmelfarb considers whether and how late antique Jews may have responded to Christian interpretations of blood and circumcision, exploring the possibility that some rabbis may have been aware of the views voiced by the third-century Christian exegete Origen during his time in Roman Palestine. Himmelfarb thus considers the place of blood in rabbinic representations of Abraham's circumcision and the *Aqedah*, focusing on traditions found in the *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael* and *Genesis Rabbah*. Although blood figures differently in the two sources, she suggests that both represent tactical responses to specific Christian claims concerning the supersession of the covenantal blood of circumcision by the covenantal blood of Jesus' crucifixion.

In "Blood Will Out: Jesus' Circumcision and Early Christian Readings of Exodus 4:24-26," Andrew Jacobs explores the ways in which late antique Christians negotiated their identities vis-à-vis Judaism by focusing on the representation of covenantal blood in a broad range of patristic writings. By considering patristic exegesis of Exod 4:24-26 and reflections on the circumcision of Jesus, his article exposes the many and poignant ways in which circumcision, conceived precisely as a quintessential mark of Jewish (male) difference, served as a touch-stone for the Christian need to negotiate effectively Christianity's own inexorable insistence on its origins in the life of a Jewish Christ.

The theme-issue concludes with a co-authored article that considers the atoning power of blood shed in death by juxtaposing two understudied sources. In "Blood and Atonement in the Pseudo-Clementines and *The Story of the Ten Martyrs*: The Problem of Selectivity in the Study of 'Judaism' and 'Christianity,'" the editors argue that the views of atoning blood in both of these texts challenge standard accounts of the "essential" natures of Judaism and Christianity as religious systems and of the differences between them. The juxtaposition of the diverging views of blood within the Pseudo-Clementines and *The Story of the Ten Martyrs*, moreover, occasions broader methodological reflection concerning which sources scholars select as characteristic or distinctive of a given religious "tradition" – and which sources are presumed to be atypical or even marginal because they diverge from our often unexamined assumptions

about the scope and boundaries of what are, in fact, surprisingly unpredictable religious formations.

Taken together, we hope that the essays in this theme-issue expose the fascinating complexities involved both in communal self-definition and in the discourse about blood in Late Antiquity. A concern for blood, as we shall see, is evident in sources from diverse literary genres, ranging from the halakhic materials analyzed by Fonrobert, to the theological arguments considered by Glancy, to the exegetical debates examined by Himmelfarb and Jacobs. Furthermore, Jewish and Christian interest in blood is not limited to the centuries directly following the destruction of the Second Temple. Just as Glancy and Fonrobert show how Jews and Christians alike used the blood of women to articulate the boundaries of their identities in the second and third centuries, so Himmelfarb and Jacobs demonstrate the intensity with which questions about blood continued to be discussed by Jews and Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries. And, as our own piece argues, such concerns could take surprising forms, as Jewish and Christian ideas about blood continued to transform in response to new social and political realities.