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Book Reviews

Jonathan Klawans. *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. x, 372 pp.
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In this forcefully written book, Jonathan Klawans offers a compelling case for pursuing a sympathetic symbolic approach to the sacrificial cult that was at the heart of ancient Israelite and early Jewish religion. The book revolves around two main axes, one critical and the other constructive. First, Klawans seeks to expose the foundational—and deeply problematic—assumptions underlying most modern scholarly interpretations of this elaborate system of vegetable and especially animal offerings. Second, he presents a novel interpretation of the primary organizing principles that made the sacrificial process socially and symbolically meaningful for those who engaged in it.

Klawans makes clear at the outset just how much is at stake in his efforts to clear this field of inquiry of analytical inconsistency and theological prejudice. Interpretations of the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem Temple are too often predicated on the twin axioms of teleological "evolutionism" and theological "supersessionism." Sacrifice is thus consistently cast as, at best, a rudimentary stage in the inexorable progress of human religious life or, at worst, a strange, barbaric, and even immoral vestige of the essentially violent nature of humanity. In either case, the cult is imagined to have been transmuted, more or less successfully, into increasingly expressive and genuine forms of religious piety, such as prayer, Torah study, or the liturgical commemoration of Jesus' atoning death. These presuppositions have informed—and, in turn, been reinforced by—the great modern theories of religion: From Durkheim and Freud to Girard and Burkert, modern thinkers have been fascinated by (their fantasies of) the "primitive" sacrificial act, which they see as a window into the very origins, and thus the essential nature, of human society and culture.

Although this critique of the "search for origins" in the study of sacrifice covers ground well trod by Jonathan Z. Smith and others, Klawans's trenchant assessment of previous theories of ancient Israelite sacrifice should serve as a model for judicious engagement with methods and tools pioneered in the social sciences. Particularly significant is his astute account of the diametrically opposed treatments that the systems of ritual *sacrifice* and ritual *purity* have received in recent scholarship. Largely under the salutary influence of Mary Douglas, biblical and Jewish purity regulations are now generally studied in synchronic terms as coherent systems of symbolic action. By contrast, studies of the sacrificial cult continue to be encumbered by a powerful anti-ritual bias that tends to focus attention on the progressive development and eventual eclipse of this awkward institution.

In my view, Klawans's most significant methodological contribution to the study of sacrifice is his rehabilitation of the role played by metaphor in this ritual system. Klawans follows the cognitive-linguistic approach of George Lakoff, which stresses that metaphors are not temporally or developmentally secondary to embodied practices but are coeval with and essential to the logic of all human action—cultic or otherwise. Symbolically meaningful religious forms are not the sole province of a world that has outgrown sacrifice. Rather, purity and sacrifice belonged to a unified but multivalent ritual process that had always already been simultaneously concrete *and* symbolic.

In Chapter 2, Klawans applies this central methodological insight to the task of discerning the organizing principles that gave the "sacrificial process," as described in the Hebrew Bible, its motivation and meaning. Encompassing both preparatory purifications and a regular sequence of sacrificial actions, this ritual system engendered, enacted, *and* fulfilled (1) the desire to imitate god (*imitatio dei*) and (2) the equally potent drive to maintain the presence of God within the Temple and its community. Klawans defends his application of ritual theory to the gap-ridden biblical text; after all, even descriptions of "living" rituals are always inherently mediated and thus partial. More controversial—and, to my mind, less convincing—is Klawans's contention that the priestly and holiness sources reflect a single vision of the Temple cult and can thus be studied synchronically as a unified whole. This move aims to counteract the evolutionist impulses that characterize much source-critical scholarship on the Hebrew Bible. But the specter of teleology cannot, I think, serve as *a priori* grounds for minimizing the ideological heterogeneity of the biblical text and disregarding its potential value for reconstructing processes of historical change and social conflict. Appealing to a hermeneutic of sympathy—but without providing sufficiently thorough textual reasoning—Klawans has, in effect, reinscribed in his interpretation of Israelite sacrifice the highly particular but authoritative perspective articulated in the canonized end product of what were, in fact, messy compositional and historical processes.

In Chapter 3, however, the dynamism and heterogeneity that are generated by innovation and contestation reenter the picture. The sacrificial system of ancient Israel, as it turns out, was a highly contested affair. In a highly original analysis, Klawans argues that, although both priests and prophets would have agreed that sacrificial gifts must be the rightful property of those who offer them, some prophetic writings present a maximalist interpretation of this principle. For these prophets, many of whom were themselves drawn from the priestly caste, the fundamental economic inequalities that they viewed as endemic to ancient Israelite society rendered the offerings of the rich both morally *and* ritually unacceptable. Thus, the prophetic critique did not pit "genuine ethics" against "mere ritual," as many would have it, but rather understood social justice and sacrificial worship to be wholly interdependent domains.

In Part II of the book, Klawans turns his attention to the attitudes toward temple and cult found in the literature of early Judaism as well as in the New Testament texts of nascent Christianity. Chapter 4 traces the two dominant conceptualizations of the Temple that wended their way through a millennium and a half of

Jewish writings, from the Hellenistic period until the European Middle Ages. Klawans shows that the Jerusalem Temple could be imagined either (1) as a representation of the cosmos or (2) as the earthly counterpart of a heavenly sanctuary. Each of these images is governed by its own independent logic, and the two should not be conflated. More importantly, far from reflecting a "spiritualization" of the physical cult, these images attest to the pervasive influence of cultic idioms on—the "templization" of—all aspects of Jewish cultural and religious life.

Unfortunately, Klawans surveys the literary history of this imagery only rather schematically. His discussion of *Midrash Tadshe*, for example, lacks textual specificity (and fails to consider the findings of Martha Himmelfarb, which demonstrate the concrete literary influence of certain Second Temple sources on the midrashic writings associated with Rabbi Moshe ha-Darshan and his circle[1]). More problematic still is Klawans's out-of-hand rejection of the possibility that the image of a heavenly temple might, in some cases, be linked to criticisms of the cult. It is, of course, true that the notion of a temple in heaven cannot be presumed, in and of itself, to constitute a critique of earthly realities. Still, many of the texts surveyed here do, I think, articulate specific concerns with the functioning of the Jerusalem Temple or the behaviors of its personnel. Any reconsideration of these questions must build from sustained textual analysis—and cannot merely proceed from a principled suspicion, however reasonable in many cases, of "spiritualizing" interpretations.

Indeed, a number of the texts discussed in Chapter 4, such as the *Book of the Watchers*, would have been equally at home in Chapter 5, which surveys the critical stance taken toward the cult in some Second Temple writings, especially in the Qumran documents. A number of texts explicitly identify moral, ritual, and even structural deficiencies in the cult, although Klawans rightly stresses that these sources neither reject cultic ritual as such nor seek to replace the cult permanently with a novel set of religious practices. One might question, however, Klawans's rationale for his division of the sources between these two chapters. Had Chapter 5 been restricted to the sectarian writings from Qumran, this division might have been understandable. But, as it is, I was not persuaded that *Jubilees* and the *Temple Scroll*, neither of which can be considered sectarian strictly speaking, would be more (or less) likely to express criticism of the cult than, say, the *Testament of Levi* or certain Enochic documents. This division seems to suggest, in effect, that substantive critique of the cult during the Second Temple period was largely, if not exclusively, a sectarian phenomenon. This conclusion is not borne out by the textual evidence.

Chapters 6 and 7 offer revisionist interpretations of a number of classic rabbinic and New Testament texts relating to the Jerusalem Temple and its ritual system. Klawans finds that rabbinic sources do not attribute the destruction

1. "Some Echoes of *Jubilees* in Medieval Hebrew Literature," in *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. C. Reeves (Atlanta, GA: Scholars' Press, 1994), 115–41; and idem, "R. Moses the Preacher and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *AJS Review* 9, no. 1 (1984): 55–78.

of the Temple in 70 CE to the moral or ritual shortcomings of its priesthood. The rabbis were not radical innovators formulating a perfected form of Judaism to replace this now outmoded form of worship. Instead, the rabbinic attitude toward the Temple builds squarely on the widespread desire among Jews, which had begun to develop long before the destruction, to "emulate the temple beyond its bounds" (253). Similarly, although a number of influential New Testament texts, such as Stephen's speech in Acts 7 and the pseudo-Pauline letter to the Hebrews, do articulate powerful anti-Temple messages, the well-known passages from the synoptic gospels that recount the events of the Last Supper and Jesus' so-called cleansing of the Temple can best be read as confirmation of the vital role that the sacrificial cult continued to play in the formation of religious practice among ancient Jews, including the followers of Jesus. In Klawans's reading, Jesus' Eucharistic statements at the Last Supper are not meant to discredit the cult but to draw its symbolic resonances and ritual authority from it. And, in disrupting the normal functioning of the Temple, Jesus (or the gospel writers) did not wish to signal the coming end of animal sacrifice but to build on the tradition of prophetic critique, with its dual commitment to moral scrupulousness *and* ritual rigor.

Klawans is at his best when dissecting the faulty textual reasoning of received scholarly opinion and the problematic analytical presuppositions on which they are based. The book does not, however, always linger over matters of textual interpretation in sufficient detail, often privileging general historiographic preferences over the specifics of literary history. Still, it is my sincere hope that scholars of ancient Judaism will read—and internalize—Klawans's sophisticated account of the vital role that metaphorical thinking plays in constituting cultural practices such as sacrifice as symbolically meaningful actions.

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Howard Apothaker. *Sifra, Dibbura DeSinai: Rhetorical Formulae, Literary Structures, and Legal Traditions*. Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2003. 464 pp.
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Relatively little research is being done in the area of *midrash halakhah*. Of the work being done, most of it—for example, the prodigious labors of Menahem Kahana—falls under the rubric of philology. Only a few scholars—most notably Jacob Neusner, Steven Fraade, Daniel Boyarin, and Moshe Halbertal—have addressed the question of how to understand the project of *midrash halakhah*. (Jay Harris has helped us understand how the endeavor was viewed by Jews from the medieval period and onward, but this is a separate issue.) Therefore, any attempt to explicate the program of a work of *midrash halakhah*, such as