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THE KID AND ITS MOTHER'S MILK

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It is written: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk."

This injunction occurs three times in the Pentateuch, Exod. 23:19, 34:26; Deut. 14:21. Upon it a series of observances that radically affect the lives of some millions of people is assumed to be based. Its unusual character, its context, and its history are such as to merit the attention it has received from anthropologists as well as exegetes.

It is accordingly curious that an important textual variant has received scarcely any attention at the hands of commentators. The passage as found in all the English translations is based upon the Massoretic text. But in all the manuscripts of the LXX, it is a lamb that is mentioned and not a kid.¹ For many purposes, doubtless, it is indifferent, and particularly indifferent in respect to the inferences which have been drawn from the passage by the later Jews. But if we consider it as a matter of ancient ritual, it is not at all indifferent. The selection of a sacrificial animal was a matter of great moment. We must accept one or the other reading.

That the reading "kid" is preferable, is based not merely on the general probability in favor of the Massorah for all Pentateuchal questions, but on an important rule of textual criticism. "Kid" is the *difficilior lectio*. That is to say, it is much easier to imagine how an original reading "kid" was changed to "lamb" than the reverse. In Alexandria lambs were much more frequently eaten than kids. Since this passage was from the earliest times interpreted as a dietary regulation, Alexandrian Jews would be tempted unconsciously to substitute the lamb as a type of flesh. In Judea, where kids were somewhat more commonly used for food, but still less commonly than lambs, there is no apparent reason for changing an original reading of "lamb"

¹ A late manuscript has *ἄρπον*, "kid" in the margin. But that is obviously a correction based upon the Massoretic text or the Vulgate. Cf. also Philo, *De Humanitate* § 18 (Cohn V, 301) and Clemens Alex. *Stromata*, II, 18.



in a sacred text to "kid." The old Latin version, which is a literal translation of the LXX, keeps the word "lamb" in the passages in which it has survived. But it will be noted that in the Vulgate, St. Jerome deliberately changed the "agnum" of the Itala to *haedum*, "kid," although he, too, in general used the LXX as the basis of his translation.

What does the passage really mean? Why should one "not seethe a kid in its mother's milk?" For many centuries it has been treated, as has been said, as a dietary regulation, and certain practices of modern Jews are avowedly based upon it. These practices—which are more markedly characteristic of the life of the people than the abstention from pork—consist of drawing a sharp distinction between food products derived from flesh and food products derived from milk, and never consuming the two together. Obviously no such rule is inherent in the very specific prohibition of the Bible. If the later usage was indeed derived from this command, it was derived by a process of strained judicial interpretation. As a matter of fact, it is rather unlikely that it was so derived. The rule not to eat milk and flesh together is very old. It is spoken of as an established custom in early Talmudic times, and it is probable enough that the rabbis, in their search for biblical authority for an ancient and sanctified practice, selected this passage of the Pentateuch as most nearly covering it.¹

It is not necessary to refute the suggestion of apologetes, ancient and modern, that the injunction had its origin in humanitarian views like those that are common at the present day. If it is true, as has been stated, that not even in the extant teachings of Jesus is there a word of sympathy with the sufferings of brutes,² we shall hardly expect to find such sympathy in a people trained to regard a ritual of bloody sacrifice as one of the most emphatically divine of institutions. Indeed nowhere in the Mediterranean world is there more than a trace of anything approaching modern feeling in this respect, not

¹ *Jewish Enc.*, VIII, 591, s.v. "Milk."

² The overturning of the seats "of them that sold the doves" (Mark xi. 15), has been so interpreted. But that is at best a dubious inference, and there is certainly no unmistakable injunction on the point. However, cf. the passage of Philo already cited, *De Hum.* 18 seq.

even in those societies that for one reason or another absolutely abstained from animal food.

It has long been suggested—first apparently by no less a person than Maimonides (1100 A.D.)—that the seething of a kid as here prohibited was an idolatrous rite of Israel's neighbors.¹ This view is the one that almost all modern critical commentators adopt and it has general probability in its favor. However, no direct evidence has been offered that such a rite or anything really like it, existed. In Arabia it seems that the cooking of flesh with milk and herbs is a popular dish at the present time. There is evidence that the habit dates back at least a thousand years and may have been very ancient. But this form of food was not associated with any religious rite. The Jews were not required to abstain from all the delicacies enjoyed by their neighbors, but only from the religious customs of their neighbors. And, most important of all for our present purpose, the Arabic custom included all forms of flesh and was not confined to the flesh of kids or goats.

If we look at the context, we shall see at once that the passages are in every instance but loosely connected with what goes before or what follows them. In Exodus the command is put at the end of certain sacrificial rules, and in Deuteronomy at the end of some dietary rules. And in all cases it has apparently little or nothing to do with the general subject of the section in which it is found. If we had other texts before us that had no halo of sanctity, we should scarcely hesitate to draw one inference from this circumstance, and that is that the passage in question was put into its present context later than the other parts of the section, and that it was something consciously felt to be exceptional and anomalous.

It would have been strange indeed if such a passage had escaped the erudition and thorough investigation of Sir James Frazer. He briefly commented on it in his contribution to the Tylor Studies, and, in his recent work, *Folklore in the Old Testament* (III, 110-64) he makes it the subject of an exhaustive discussion. It is ill gleaning where Sir James has reaped, and it is not likely that any custom among primitive people has been omitted. Every conceivable form of milk

¹ Maimonides *Guide to the Perplexed* iii. 48.

taboo is there set forth and examined. By way of illustration it may be mentioned that the boiling of milk—any boiling of it—is prohibited in Sierra Leone, among the Masai, the Baganda, the Thonga, and other tribes of Eastern or Central Africa. The manner of boiling milk is restricted among Bulgarian and Esthonian peasants. In many parts of Asia and Africa other restrictions on the use of milk are found, most of them of a religious character. In their most fully developed form they are to be found in the much cited "dairy civilization" of the Todas of India.

The explanation which Frazer and other anthropologists give is based upon sympathetic magic. The boiling of milk, it is supposed, will, according to well-known principles, directly injure the animal from which it is taken, and so imperil an important source of the food supply. This is specifically asserted to be the explanation advanced by the tribes themselves in most cases. It seems quite plausible. And we are quite prepared to find Frazer assigning the biblical command to the same underlying idea (p. 124). "On this theory, an objection will be felt to seething or boiling a kid in any milk because the she-goat from which the milk had been drawn would be injured by the process whether she was the dam of the boiled kid or not. The reason why the mother's milk is specially mentioned may have been either because as a matter of convenience the mother's milk was more likely to be used than any other. For being linked to the boiling pot by a double bond of sympathy, since the kid as well as the milk had come from her bowels, the mother goat was twice as likely as any other goat, to lose her milk or to be killed outright by the heat and ebullition."

So far Sir James. The difficulty in applying the customs here collected is, first of all, that they all refer merely to the boiling of the milk as such, and not one of them has anything at all to do with the cooking of flesh in milk. Now, it is the cooking of the flesh, not the boiling of the milk, that seems to be the body of the biblical prohibition. If flesh was not seethed in it, milk was, as far as we know, often boiled by the Hebrews without religious let or hindrance. Curdled milk was often used by them, and curdled milk is generally tabooed where boiled milk is. Secondly, among all the peoples

mentioned by Frazer, it is milk of all kinds that is subject to the prohibition. In the Bible it is only goat's milk. Goat's milk was not the main source of milk among the Israelites. It was used by them, but not more frequently than cow's milk, and probably nothing like as frequently as cow's milk among the Transjordanic tribes, where, if anywhere, the nomadic rules would be enforced in their pristine purity.

That is, in all the examples collected by the anthropologists, there is none that really resembles our practice. Nowhere except here is there any reference to a particular species, much less to a kid. Nowhere except here does the taboo concern the boiling of flesh. Nowhere except here is the relation of mother and young mentioned at all.

Influences that have shaped the life of the Jews—and particularly in what we call biblical times—are generally sought east and south of Palestine. But Palestine was open to invasion both of men and of ideas from all sides. If anything, the land was more exposed to the west and north. Perhaps it might be well to look in those directions.

Of all the East-Mediterranean peoples, we know the Greeks most fully; and, despite the curiously distorted view often presented of them by traditional manuals, we probably know them best. In the study of Greek religion, however, it is only a little more than fifty years that investigators have freed themselves from the theological and polemical bias that the early church fathers transmitted to their successors in the cathedrae of European universities. We are now in a position better to understand those religious movements that passed over the Greeks in successive waves almost throughout the entire time that we have records of them. One of them was the Orphic religion that may have either followed or immediately preceded the Dionysiac religion in spreading rapidly throughout the Greek world.

The great influence of both these faiths in the development of Greek thought has been obscured by the fact that the fragmentary literature that has come down to us presents almost exclusively the point of view of philosophic rationalism or, in its poetic form, is

framed in the orthodox ritual mythology. Orphism may be said to have as its cardinal doctrine the identity of gods and men, the personal immortality of the latter or of some of them, and the possibility of securing the highest enjoyment of that immortality, the felicitous lives of the gods themselves, by establishing personal relations with them in this life. This was done by means of mysteries, a mystery being a form of social corporation in which by appropriate rites, on special occasions, men might come into a contact with the gods that was deemed to be nothing short of physical. The rites used by the mysteries may have been of varied origin. At an early period the rites of Bacchism were adopted in many Orphic conventicles, and just as often the Orphic theology was accepted by the Bacchic congregations and amalgamated with their own.

Both Orphism and Bacchism came from the north. How far north we cannot be quite sure. But they probably both had their fullest development among the people that were called "Thracians" on one side of the Hellespont and "Phrygians" on the other. In all likelihood these people spoke an Indo-European tongue, and, besides Orphism and Bacchism, we know of three other important and widespread mystery-religions that were developed in the same region: the worship of the Cabiri, of Sabazios, and of Cybele.

The Orphic-Dionysiac ceremonial had a sacramental character. That is, the essence of it was a mystic meal at which gods and mystae took part on equal terms, not, as in the common Greek lectisternia, as worshipers and worshiped, but as brothers of one blood. To prepare for these rites was the purpose of the initiatory rites to which neophytes had to subject themselves. And the stages of their preparation required, as in all such cases, both certain holy actions and the symbolic repetition of these actions in words that described them. We have long known the words with which a Phrygian initiate presented himself to the love feast. "I have drunk from the cup; I have borne the cernos; I have passed under the pastos."¹ It is highly probable that he either suited the action to the word, or had performed the action immediately before uttering the word, since even gods are more inclined to believe what they see than to take anyone's word for it.

¹ Clemens Alex. *Coh. ad Gentes*, p. 5; *Syl. Migne Patr. Gr.*, VIII, p. 75.

Now, in Italy, in the neighborhood of the ancient Sybaris, which we know was a center of Orphic worship, there were found, not so long ago, a number of gold lamina containing fragments of an Orphic liturgy, couched in the form of a dialogue between the god, or the priest, on one side, and the neophyte on the other. On one of them it is the priest that says: "Oh happy and blessed, god wilt thou become instead of mortal." And the neophyte replies, "A kid, I fell into the milk." In another case the whole phrase is put into the mouth of the priest: "A god hast thou become instead of mortal; a kid, thou didst fall into the milk."¹

Many explanations of the Greek words have been offered, some of them extremely fanciful. But the obvious and unstrained meaning of the Greek words is that the mystes identifies the beatitude into which he enters with the condition of a kid that has been immersed in milk; and by the same token identifies himself with the kid. That an utterance like this was accompanied by some symbolic act is highly likely, and in this case there is no reason why the act should not have been the actual putting of a freshly sacrificed kid into a cauldron of milk. And, if we recall some of the subtleties of this form of ritual, the kid represents the god as well, and the sacrifice is both vicarious and temporary, destined to turn into a triumphant resuscitation. This is surely what took place in other Thracian and Phrygian cults, concerning which we have unequivocal testimony.

In the entire mass of Greek literature and inscriptions there is only one god that ever bore the cult-title of Eriphos, or "the Kid."² That is Dionysus, the god who alone can be meant in the South Italian liturgy. Accordingly, the initiate who plunges the body of the kid into the milk and asserts that he identifies himself with it becomes, by so doing, one with Dionysus, saved eternally from the dreary nothingness of Hades or the hideous purgations which less fortunate souls must endure, and assured of an endless felicity in the life beyond.

¹ Jane E. Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 2d ed., pp. 594 ff. *Inscript. Graecae Sicil. et Ital.* 641, 1, v. 10. The words *ἔπερον*, *ἔπερες* here translated by "fall," would perhaps be better rendered by "threw myself," since the verb *πίπτω* is commonly used in that sense.

² Hesychius, s.v. *ἔριφος*.

If we turn again to the biblical passage, we see at once that we have much that was missed in the many instances collected by Frazer. We have a sacrificial rite addressed directly to the Abomination, to one of the heathen gods. As such it would come under the general prohibition of all heathen rites and would need no special mention. But this one involved something more than the performance of a forbidden act of worship, a disloyalty to Yahve. It implied the atrocious blasphemy of identifying the creature with the Creator, the attempt to become as gods, the sin of Adam, the sin of Babel. If such an act were known to the pious and orthodox revisers of the Pentateuch, if they had seen it or heard of it, they might well have put a prohibition of it in the mouth of Yahve himself or of his envoy.

Did they know of it? It is a long way from the Hellespont to Judea, still longer from Sybaris to Judea. Have we any evidence, except the vague possibility of transmission, that the Orphic-Dionysiac propaganda had reached this corner of the Levant as early let us say, as 400 B.C.? If we might wait till Alexander, the difficulties would disappear, but we cannot safely ascribe any part of the Pentateuch to a date after Alexander. May we bring Dionysus to Palestine a century before his Macedonian kinsman?

The chief article of faith in the Orphic-Dionysiac mysteries was the belief in a personal immortality. This doctrine had begun to spread from the Hellespont through the Greek world as early as the eighth century. When the Judean community was re-established after the Babylonian Exile, that is, about 530 B.C., the belief in a personal immortality seems to have already found some popular favor. It was violently repudiated by the ecclesiastical authorities. Polemics against it appear in many of the later psalms,¹ as well as in other parts of the Bible and the Apocrypha,² but it gained ground rapidly. Shortly after the Maccabean revolt, we find it the cardinal doctrine of those religious fraternities that called themselves the "Comrades" or the "Elect," and that are known to us as the "Pharisees." It was not accepted as a part of the official religion till the final triumph of

¹ Ps. vi. 8; lxxxviii. 10; cv. 17.

² Eccles. xvii. 27, 28; cf. also the pseudo-Philonian *Antiquit. Bibl.*

Phariseeism in the Palestinian academies—a triumph we shall do well to postpone till after the Bar-Kochba revolt, in 133 A.D. When we first meet the Pharisees, we find them powerful and organized bodies. How many centuries of preaching and slow infiltration may have passed before they reached that condition?

So much we may certainly say. If the doctrine of a personal immortality was first propagated by cult-communities using rites like those of Sybaris—rites that must have seemed the summit of blasphemy to rigidly conservative Jews—we can readily allow three centuries or even more before the horror they first inspired would be sufficiently abated to enable their characteristic doctrine to become the chief tenet of intensely zealous corporations. And if we can go back three centuries before the Maccabees, we are surely in a period at which the text of Exodus and Deuteronomy was far from being fixed, and pious interpolations were almost a matter of course.

We may go still further. At Raphia, in southern Palestine, Dionysus was particularly worshiped, and at this place the kid was his symbolic animal.¹ Here, too, he was known by the rare and enigmatic cult-title of "Eiraphiotes." The use of this title may be merely a pun on the name of the city, but Dionysus Eiraphiotes was connected with this section in the fragmentary hymn to Dionysus quoted by Diodorus Siculus.² This hymn is probably of the sixth century or earlier. Indeed, the title "Eiraphiotes" resists Greek etymology and may be Semitic. Dionysus the Kid, consequently actually is found in close proximity to the Hebrews, at a time when, by hypothesis, we should like to find him there.

If the typical mystery-doctrine is known to have been widely spread in Palestine, if the mystery-god is found established there, if the kid is known to have been sacred to him there, if the only non-biblical reference to the immersion of a kid in milk is associated with the same god, it is not too bold a hypothesis to assume that this anomalous and curiously placed biblical passage is also somehow associated with Dionysus, and the act prohibited in Exodus and

¹ *Etyim. Magn.* 371. 57.

² *Bibl. Hist.*, III, 65. The word may also occur in a fragment of Alcaeus *Bergk* fr. 55 *Lyra Graeca* (Loeb Class. Lib.), i. 174. But we cannot be quite sure that *ἑρραφῆν* is really the same word.

Deuteronomy is the very rite that identified an Italiote Greek with the dread Dionysus of the Balkan wilds.¹

In the Sybaritan inscription there is no reference to the fact that the milk was of the kid's dam. However, we learn from Hesychius and the *Etym. Magn.* that where Dionysus was called "Eriphus, the Kid," his nurse was known as "Eriphe."² That is, to be sure, but a vague hint, but it suggests an association of the god and his nurse in the same ritual, and gives a slight additional support to the supposition that the mystes who threw himself symbolically into the milk used for that purpose milk of the same divine character as his symbol.³

¹ An association of the biblical prohibition with these Italian inscriptions has been suggested by Ramsay, *s.v.* "Phrygians," Hastings, *Enc. of Rel. and Ethics*, IX, 905; and also by Salomon Reinach (*Cultes, Mythes, etc.*, ii. 123) whose exhaustive erudition in these fields is almost certain to preclude the claims of later investigators to originality. However, in both instances, it remained a brief hint.

² Cf. *supra*, notes 7 and 10.

³ There is also the fact that in the mysteries, Dionysus and his mother are almost as closely associated as Demeter and Kore. He goes down to Hades and brings her up with him to dwell forever among the stars.