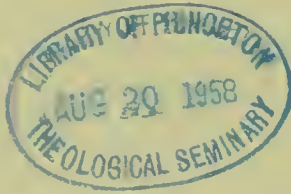


M.G. Kyle

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# EGYPTIAN SACRIFICES

A STUDY OF SACRIFICIAL SCENES  
IN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

BY

M. G. KYLE

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Tirage à part du *Recueil de Travaux relatifs à la Philologie et à l'Archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes*. Vol. XXVII.



PARIS (2<sup>e</sup>)

LIBRAIRIE ÉMILE BOULLON, ÉDITEUR

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## EGYPTIAN SACRIFICES

### A STUDY OF SACRIFICIAL SCENES IN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

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This is a record of some years' investigation of the representations of Egyptian sacrifices, found among the abundant decorative and illustrative remains of Egypt, her mural sculptures and painting, sculptured stele, tablets and other monuments large and small, illuminations of coffins and sarcophagi, vignettes of papyri, in short, everything accessible whereon any representation of the offerings is pictured; while the literature of the subject has been laid under contribution, both the inscriptions of Egypt and the dissertations of Egyptologists, published and unpublished, the study has been mainly of the sacrificial scenes. There may be difference of opinion about the advantage of such a method, but it has been followed in reliance upon two things: that what was esteemed of most importance would find its way into the pictured representations produced in such profusion, and that written allusions to a wholly unfamiliar ritual are specially liable to misapprehension.

I. ASSUMPTIONS. — It is important to clear the way for the results of the investigation by taking note of the prevalent and long current assumption concerning Egyptian sacrifices, the assumption that appearances in Egypt correspond to what we

know of Roman, Greek and Semitic sacrifices. Persons are seen bringing animals and other objects to the priests : it has been often assumed that these were sacrifices in the ordinary sense, propitiatory or expiatory. The slaying of the victim is shown : it has been assumed that its life was for the life of the offerer. Parts of animals and other objects are seen heaped upon offering tables : it has been assumed that they were peace-offerings or thank-offerings. Other pieces of flesh and collections of vegetables are seen sometimes, though, comparatively, only rarely, upon the altar itself : it has often been assumed that they were burned. Thus Egypt has been given by a kind of tacit consent a whole elaborate system of sacrifices similar to the sacrifices of the Romans, the Greeks, the Phœnicians or the Hebrews, according to the view-point and predilections of the writer. And the final assumption has been that Egypt having thus a great sacrificial system of such a character, it held of necessity an important place in the Egyptian religion, was a hope, indeed, of the people for acceptance with the gods.

These assumptions have been explicit on the part of most scholars not technically Egyptologists; they have had positive beliefs on the subject. They have been implicit on the part of many Egyptologists: they have not had positive beliefs but have taken over the assumptions bodily, adopted their appropriate nomenclature and permitted without protest or warning the general acceptance of the belief in such a system of Egyptian sacrifices. One of the latest works of reference<sup>1</sup> says: "The method of killing "and offering animals, the burning of incense [upon bronze censers of ladle form], the "ablutions, and many other ritualistic details, were similar to those practiced among "the Israelites", which well illustrates the prevalent and long current attitude toward the subject of Egyptian sacrifices.

Let us clear from phantasms the whole field of vision, by sweeping away at a single blow all these assumptions, and enquire into the real meaning of every appearance that comes before us in the whole field of Egyptology, as the Egyptians have pictured themselves at their public and private rites.

II. LITERATURE. — Before entering upon an account of this investigation and its results, it will be helpful to see upon how small a foundation of real scientific investigation and conclusion the common beliefs concerning Egyptian sacrifices rest, by observing how little Egyptologists have written upon the subject. It is impossible for any one to say he knows all the literature of a subject, and especially such a subject, not in any sense popular, so that much that is written upon it remains in great obscurity. Then, there are published in various languages so many books and pamphlets of very limited edition which find their way into few or no public libraries or catalogues. But when one has searched some of the great libraries and catalogues and followed out the suggestions of two or three of the most noted specialists in a department of knowledge, the list of publications so made up may fairly be called the literature of the subject. The subjoined list is the result of the most careful and

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1. *Encyclopædia Biblica*. Art. *Egypt*. 19.

exhaustive research in the Königl. Bibliothek in Berlin, with extensive search also in the British Museum Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the Library of the University of Pennsylvania, the Ridgway branch of the Philadelphia Library and the Astor Library of New York.

Some of these books it will be sufficient to mention; from others, I will note the most interesting passages :

- (1) *Il Libro dei Funerali*. Ernesto SCHIAPARELLI, Torino, 1879.
- (2) *Les Vêtements du grand prêtre et des Lévites*. L'abbé Victor ANCESSI, Paris, 1875.
- (3) *Religion und Mythology*. Heinrich BRUGSCH.
- (4) *L'Histoire ancienne de l'Orient classique*, p. 122. Professor MASPERO calls the sacrifice a banquet, and, in describing what is done with the sacrifice of the bull by the priest, says: "On en brûlait une partie à la face de l'idole, on distribuait le reste aux assistants avec une profusion de gâteaux, de fruits, de légumes et de vin." See also page 123, especially: "Le culte ainsi, etc."
- (5) *La Table d'offrandes des tombeaux égyptiens*, par G. MASPERO, dans la *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 1897, p. 276 sqq.
- (6) *The Dawn of Civilization*, MASPERO, p. 250, 252-253.
- (7) *The Oldest Books of the World*, Isaac MEYER, p. xvi: "The sacrifices in Egypt were not so bloody as the Jewish, they were mostly of fruit, flowers, bread, water, wine, and sometimes but rarely, of oxen, goats and geese." Meyer treats sacrifices in a few lines and these scattered through a large volume; see also page 188.
- (8) *Résumé de l'histoire de l'Égypte*, AMÉLINEAU. See the introduction, pages 35, 37, 38, concerning the theory of human sacrifices in Egypt.
- (9) *Rites égyptiens*, E. LEFÈBRE, page 4, on the view that the idea of the Egyptian sacrifices was that the soul of the victim became a protector. Also presents the subject of human sacrifice.
- (10) *Perhaps by far the most complete discussion of this subject of Egyptian sacrifices is by Professor MASPERO in a course of lectures delivered in Paris about 1897, but unfortunately not yet published.*

The most remarkable thing about the books of the foregoing list is the remarkable brevity with which most of them treat this subject. It is still more astonishing that by far the largest portion of the books and lecture courses and articles in encyclopedias on Egyptian religion say nothing whatever on the subject of sacrifices. The three great histories of Egypt from the monuments, the works of Brugsch, Petrie and Budge, only refer to it in the most incidental way. Renouf in his Hibbert lectures of 1879 can hardly be said to refer to the subject at all. Prof. Sayce in his recent Gifford lectures on the Religion of Egypt does not treat the subject, and Prof. Steindörff, in his American lectures of 1903, passed over the sacrifices in a few sentences.

III. OFFERING SCENES. — Here again it is impossible for any one to say he has



seen everything, nor it is necessary to see everything. The demonstration is not and cannot be mathematical, but logical, an induction. I believe the induction about to be exhibited is wide enough to satisfy everyone that, what does not appear therein, either was esteemed of small importance in the minds of the Egyptians, or received but a limited acceptance among them.

A. *Publications*. — The examinations of publications has extended to all the great monuments of Egypt known in the days of Lepsius, as portrayed in his *Denkmäler*, and to all those discovered since his day, as given in the publications of the Egyptian Exploration Society and in the published accounts of the work of :

MARIETTE, *Sérapéum de Memphis, Monuments divers, Mastabas* ;

DÜMICHEN, *Altägyptische Kalenderinschriften, Altägyptische Tempelinschriften* ;

GARSTANG, *El-Arabah, Mahâsna, Bêt Khallâf* ;

PIERRET, *Recueil d'inscriptions inédites du Musée égyptien du Louvre* ;

NAVILLE, *Pithom, Route of the Exodus, Deir el-Bahari* ;

PETRIE, *Reports of his excavations, published by others than the Egyptian Exploration Society* ;

QUIBELL, *The Ramesseum, Hierakônpolis, El-Kab*.

B. *Antiquities*. — The examination of antiquities has included :

BRITISH MUSEUM, all the large monuments, the immense number of tablets and stelæ, except a very few not on exhibition at present, frescoes from Egyptian tombs, coffins, sarcophagi and mummy cases ;

At GOWER STREET COLLEGE, London, the valuable collections of Prof. Petrie ;

At LEYDEN, the fine collection of tablets containing scenes of offerings, and the vignettes of the large and most valuable collection of papyri of the Book of the Dead ;

At BERLIN, all the inscribed sculptures, large and small, on exhibition, especially the large number of sepulchral tablets and other tablets bearing scenes of offerings, together with the mummy cases and tomb inscriptions ;

At PARIS, all the inscribed monuments with the tablets and stelæ, especially the great Mariette collection in the Salle d'Apis, where the offerings are represented before the visible Bull-god.

This wide induction reveals concerning the materials, the method, the meaning of the sacrifices as follows :—

(1) *Materials*. — The obscurity, which has hung like a fogbank over the subject of the Egyptian sacrifices, has yet permitted the materials for the most part to stand out in the clear sunlight. There are the great offering lists recorded at Medinet-Habou, and the constantly reiterated lists of offerings in the funerary formulas ‘Sepulchral meals of bread, beer, oxen, geese, clothes, utensils, wax, pure water, wine, milk and all good things’. The Book of the Dead makes comparatively little reference to offerings, the significance of which fact will be pointed out when we come

to consider the meaning of the sacrifices. It is sufficient now to note the fact; yet there is in the Book of the Dead distinct mention of the offerings<sup>1</sup>.

These statements of the inscriptions and the literature of Egypt are most lavishly illustrated in the offering scenes of the monuments and the tombs. Drove of bullocks, of rams, of gazelles, of geese, are brought for the offerings, or are being butchered and made ready. Offering tables or altars are seen heaped high with legs of beef, trussed geese and dressed lambs, loaves of bread and jars of oil, or other liquid, and all these built up with mathematical precision in perpendicular heaps to an astonishing height. Again, libations of wine are being poured, incense is presented, offerings of fruit are seen, and flowers in rich profusion deck the other offerings or are presented alone. The scenes of these offerings are literally by the thousands. Thus far the question of the materials of the sacrifices may be said to be finally settled. Further investigation is not needed and will not be needed, perhaps for all time to come.

There remains one point however at which the sunlight has not penetrated the fog of obscurity about the sacrifices. Did human beings form any part of the materials of sacrifice? Ancient Greek, Roman and Arabian writers answer in the affirmative. Theological disputants of the past century were wont to make much out of this charge against the Egyptians. And some eminent Egyptologists<sup>2</sup> have concluded from the statements and representations made by the Egyptians themselves that they offered human sacrifice. The evidence does not seem to me to support this view conclusively, and certainly does not establish human sacrifices as an usual religious rite among the Egyptians. I find no instance of their appearing on either the offering table or the altar.

However naturally human sacrifice may fall into place in a theory of the development of the sacrificial idea or be required by it, has no place in determining the facts in the case from the evidence of the monuments. That human heads are seen suspended on buildings, that the kings are seen gathering together by the hair (several feet long!) the heads of captives taken in war over which they brandish a huge sword and decapitate the whole lot at a blow, probably indicate the slaying of prisoners, in some cases, perhaps the execution of criminals, but, standing alone, they furnish no evidence of human sacrifice. It is not so long since the gates and walls of European cities were adorned by the heads of criminals: is some future archaeologist to conclude that these were human sacrifices? So also, that an Egyptian king grandiloquently devotes his enemies to the gods, as he slays them, does not to my mind increase perceptibly the evidence of human sacrifices. To devote one's enemies to the gods, as a way of cloaking revenge and cruelty with the semblance of piety, may have been common enough among Egyptian kings, but it lacks utterly the ceremonial and the solemnity of sacrifice. If the Egyptians ever did in a quiet, orderly, formal and solemn manner offer human sacrifices, they must have been ashamed of them, for they have relegated

1. *Book of the Dead*. Papyrus of Ani, plates XXX, XXXII, XXXV.

2. AMÉLINEAU, *Resumé de l'histoire de l'Égypte*, pp. 35, 37, 38. Also E. LITTRE, *Rites égyptiens*, pp. 19-20 and 36.

them to the obscurity and discredit of silence. Moreover, if a few isolated instances of human sacrifice could be well established, even that would not sufficiently support the charge of human sacrifices as a part of the religious rites of the Egyptians. In many countries and many ages and among many peoples, there have been fanatics who now and then have lapsed into this horrible tragedy.

(2) *Method*. — The method of sacrifice becomes much more important than the materials, because it is through the method mainly that we approach toward the meaning. It is here also that the pictorial representations are especially valuable. There is seen the slaying of animals and birds, the preparation of the slain victims for the offerings, and, in the case of the large animals, the preparation of pieces, the presentation of oil, wine and beer in jars, bread made into loaves, fruits, flowers laid upon the other offerings or waved in the hand. All these offerings were presented upon a flat rectangular table<sup>1</sup>, or, in the case of the funerary offerings, placed round about the tomb when the table would not hold them, sometimes upon a rectangular altar instead of a table: libations were poured, and incense burned.

Thus far all is clear and well known, but this is all that is known clearly. When it is asked what was done to indicate clearly the relation of the gift to the giver, and what further was done with the sacrifices, no satisfactory answer can be given. That some of the funerary offerings remained at the tomb is certain, for they have been found there. Whether they were usually thus abandoned, or were usually only brought and offered and then, for the most part, taken away to be used or sold, does not appear. Some things have been assumed, but, I think, cannot be shown.

Of more vital interest on the subject of sacrifices is the question, what was done with the offerings presented before the gods on the table or the altar? To this question, all my research furnishes no affirmative information, but it furnishes negative information of much value on one point: they were not burned. Herodotus asserts unequivocally indeed, that the Egyptians burned sacrifices<sup>2</sup>. That he may have seen all he describes actually practised in his day, when Greek influence was great in Egypt, cannot be doubted; that he may have supplied much of the significance and something even of the practices of sacrifice from his own ideas of sacrifice, may be suspected. The well nigh innumerable scenes of offerings do not justify the acceptance of Herodotus statement as true of really Egyptian sacrifices. Indeed, I have been unable to find a single instance of the burning of the sacrifices depicted: that there may have been isolated instances of such a practice is not improbable; that it was not an important or significant part of the regular sacrificial worship of the Egyptians, is certain. For, where the idea of the burning exists, it eclipses all other ideas. It is the final act in the great tragedy: it would be inconceivable that every artist, in depicting Egyptian sacrifices, should have missed the central idea of the rite.

If it could be thought that, for some reason to us unknown, the Egyptian artists

1. For a most exhaustive discussion of the rites connected with the table of offerings, see Prof. MASPERO, *La Table d'offrandes des tombeaux égyptiens*, dans la *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 1897.

2. *Herodotus*, II, XXXIX-XL.

were forbidden by kings and priests under whom they worked to depict the burning, we may yet appeal to the graffiti left by quarrymen at Silsileh<sup>1</sup>. Certainly to a mere observer, the burning of the sacrifice attracts more attention than any other part of the rite. If burning was a common feature of the offerings, surely these irresponsible quarrymen would have depicted that above everything else.

To the statement that the Egyptian artists never depicted the burning of the sacrifices there is one apparent exception. In the great pictorial inscription at Tel-Amarna<sup>2</sup>, the officiating priest stands offering, and the sun's disk, "Aten", which is the object of worship, is seen in splendor handing down its burning rays, each ray terminating in a hand, and the flames are actually leaping up from the altar. But the worship depicted in this scene was not Egyptian worship at all, it was Asiatic, probably Semitic, introduced by the Heretic King Amenhotep IV. That the only instance of sacrifices among Egyptians, where the burning was a part of the rites, roused such bitter resentment from the Egyptian priesthood that they arose in wrath at the death of the Heretic King, overthrow his heresy, and cast out his innovations, is the most positive and emphatic testimony the Egyptians have left us on the subject of the burning. In the face of this, the burning of sacrifice in native Egyptian worship could only be admitted upon the most positive and explicit evidence. That evidence is absolutely wanting.

Then, no preparation for the burning of the sacrifices on the altar is shown. Inflammable material wherewith the sacrifice could be consumed, is not seen, either being brought by those who present offerings, or heaped about near the altars, or placed underneath the offerings upon the altar; nor is fire wherewith to kindle the altar fire, when the sacrifice shall be ready, ever seen. Some of the best material bearing on this point may be here cited.

In the British Museum is a tablet (Number 623), on which is seen a priest before the god with a table of offerings, not an altar. Alongside of it is what seems to be a brazier with fire, while in the priests hand is an incense dish, but the brazier of fire here is evidently for the offering of incense; there is no sign of fire about the table of offerings, nor is it at all suited to the burning of sacrifice.

Smoking incense dishes are sometimes seen on the top of the heap of offerings, occasionally accompanied by a brazier of fire. Instances of this are: — British Museum (Number 10), a scene in the judgment hall, weighing the heart of the scribe Ani, a vignette of the Book of the Dead, papyrus of Ani (No. 9), the scribe Ani and his wife Thuthu adoring the god Seker-Osiris; — Berlin New Museum (IV, E 7305), Grabstein des Harmen, also 7305 and 7274; in the same museum VIII, 7321 and 10186; — a beautiful example at Musée du Louvre, Paris (C 93) and another very distinct and clear is in the salle d'Apis 630. But, in all these examples, the existence of fire only in the censer or the brazier accompanying it, the absence of any inflammable material to be kindled by the flame or the coals, and the table instead

1. PERRU, *A Scènes in Egypte*, 1887.

2. LEISTE-DOHMAYER, *Abth.* III.

of the altar, preclude any thought that the presence of fire had to do with the burning of sacrifice.

Again, the arrangement of the offerings on the altar, where that is actually seen, precluded any intention of burning a sacrifice. The offerings are placed in most mathematical order, to the very edge of the altar, and built up in a perpendicular heap to a great height. The very thought of burning such a heap on the altar is preposterous; no sooner would the fat grow warm than almost the whole heap would slip off in every direction on to the floor of the temple.

Finally, the altars found have had no sacrifice burned upon them and were not intended for the burning of sacrifices; of the very small number of altars or remains of altars yet found in Egypt, that by Prof. Petrie at Tell-Defenneh<sup>1</sup>, alone, seems at first sight to present an exception to this statement. The finding of ashes and charred remains of birds or animals in connection with foundation deposits is probably to be accepted as evidence of the burning of sacrifice, but this does not seem to me to be clearly a case in point. This place of various names, or various forms of one name, can hardly be said ever to have been in ancient times an Egyptian city; it was always from early times given over to foreigners, in the days when it was Talpanhes, to the Phœnicians and other Semites, and when it became Daphnæ, Greeks also were included among its foreigners. The deep-seated antipathy of Egyptians to foreigners, which gave rise and continuance to thoroughly foreign cities and communities in Egypt, renders these evidences of the burning of sacrifice at Tell-Defenneh of no value in this discussion, unless it be that their presence here only strengthens the antecedent presumption, that the Egyptians themselves, in their own native worship, never burned their sacrifices.

Whether altars found have been the scene of the burning of sacrifice is, as yet, largely a matter of opinion on the part of the individuals examining them, and opinions differ. In favor of the view that no sacrifice was burned upon them and that they were not intended for the burning of sacrifice, I mention the small size, compared with the large animal objects seen among the offerings, the perfectly flat top, having no ridge or depression to retain the ashes from continually falling off the sides, and the certainly disastrous action of a strong fire upon the stone of which they are made, which ought to be seen if they had been so used.

(3) *Meaning.* — The foregoing concludes the statement of facts ascertained by the investigation. Anything concerning the meaning of the Egyptian sacrifices belongs rather to the realm of inference and opinion, and it may not be out of place to state here in conclusion the opinions to which I have been led by the investigation.

The "tens of thousands" of the funerary offerings were probably, for the most part, intended only as supplies for the departed, sometimes only a wish for supplies never actually furnished, and they had no truly sacrificial significance. In the case of deified dead, particularly in the Osirian worship, something of a sacrificial meaning was

1. PETRIE, *Tanis*, Part II, in the publication of the *Egyptian Exploration Fund*.

acquired by the offerings, but of the vaguest character. From the offerings to the gods, the idea of supplies was not wholly wanting, but associated always with some really sacrificial intent. No imputation of sin from the offerer to the victim was known generally among the Egyptians, and hence no such expiation for sin as was taught among other nations. As the sacrifice was not burned, there was not the idea of such complete self-dedication as in a holocaust. It may, perhaps, be safely assumed that the sacrifices were not, for the most part, wasted, after being offered; yet there is little or no evidence of any proper sacrificial feast. It seems significant that "hotep" means "peace" or "satisfaction", but the significance seems to be dissipated when "hotep" is used for a table for funerary offerings, that were not at all sacrificial in character: at best the word only seems to point to a remote period when the true idea of expiation for sin may have been represented in the Egyptian sacrifices. The Book of the Dead shows clearly that the Egyptian's hope for the future was in his good works: of "satisfaction" through the sacrifices he knew nothing, and he says: "I have appeased God by doing his will".

The sacrifices do not appear to have entered at all into the statutory code, further than that, as there was a state religion, sacrifices entered very largely into public functions.

Of any typical character in the sacrifices there is not a trace.

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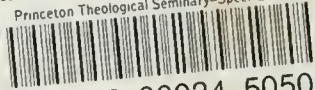
1. *Book of the Dead*. Papyrus of Ani. Plate XXXII, 11.



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