

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

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

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



Buy me a coffee

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



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php

peccata penitus."⁷ From Schoettgen and Rhenferd the passages have been handed on from one generation of New Testament scholars to another, until the "rabbinical doctrine of the second Adam" has become an accepted article of learned tradition, — I was going to say of Christian faith. No one seems to have thought of inquiring when *Neve Shalom* was written or what manner of book it might be.⁸

3. The Image of Moloch.

The current descriptions of this idol come through Nicolaus a Lyra (on Lev. 18²¹ 2 Ki. 16³ 23¹⁰) and the older Protestant commentators (Fagius on Lev. 18²¹, Drusius on Acts 7⁴³, etc.¹) from the mediaeval Jewish commentaries (Rashi on Jer. 7³¹, Kimchi on 2 Ki. 23¹⁰). These in turn repeat a Midrash which is preserved in two slightly different forms. The first is found in the Yalkut on Jer. 7³¹, where it is quoted from the Midrash Yelamedenu. The Aruch s.v. מַנְיָן (see also s.v. קַנְקַל) gives the more exact reference, Yelamedenu, Par. Kodashim, end. The Yelamedenu seems to be lost; but in one of the manuscripts collated by S. Buber for his edition of the Midrash Tanchuma the passage quoted in the Yalkut is found in an addition to the Par. Ethchanan (see *Tanchuma*, ed. Buber, Debarim fol. 8^a; Kohut, *Aruch Completum*, s.v. קַנְקַל). Comparison of the text in the Yalkut, the Aruch (so far as it is quoted there), and the Tanchuma manuscript shows numerous variations; but none which materially affect the sense.

Unlike the other heathen gods, Moloch had his place of worship outside the walls of Jerusalem. His idol stood in the innermost of seven chambers or cells, separated by grated doors (קַנְקַלִּים, Low Greek κάγκελλοι).² The worshipper who offered a bird was admitted to the first or outer cell; he who offered a goat,³ to the second; a

⁷ Of course Schoettgen, like Edzard and Rhenferd, was under no illusion as to the age and value of this parallel.

⁸ Fritzsche gives a reference to Bartolucci, but evidently gave no heed to what he might have learned from Bartolucci.

¹ See also Beyer, Addit. to Selden, *De Dis Syris*, c. vi. 1.

² In Echa rab. the word still has its original meaning, 'gratings, grated doors'; in Yelamedenu it is used of the room within these barriers; cf. the Eng. 'chancel.'

³ Tanchuma מ; in the Yalkut מַנְיָן, which cannot be right before the following מַנְיָן.

sheep, to the third ; a calf, to the fourth ; a young steer, to the fifth ; a bull, to the sixth ; and he who brought his son as an offering alone might enter into the seventh, the presence chamber of the deity. The idol itself had the head of a calf upon a human body ; its arms were extended, with the hands open like those of a man who is about to receive something from another. The image was hollow — we must suppose of metal⁴ — and was heated by a fire from within till the hands were glowing. The priests took the child from its father and laid it in the hands of Moloch, where it was burned to death ; the priests meanwhile violently beating drums that the cries of the victim might not be heard by the father and move his heart.

A slightly different version of the Midrash is found in Echa rabba-thi, Tumathah (on Lam. 1⁹). As in the Yelamedenu, the idol stood behind seven grated doors, which were opened in order to the worshippers who brought certain offerings.⁵ The image seems to be in the likeness of a man — nothing is said of a calf's head ; it holds in its hands a copper pan, beneath which is placed a portable furnace, by means of which the pan is heated. The priests lay the child in the pan, start the fire in the furnace, and shout their acclamations before the father, saying, May it be pleasant to thee ! may it be agreeable to thee ! that the offerers might not hear the crying of their sons and draw back.⁶

There is nothing in the Old Testament to suggest this gruesome description of the idol of Moloch and the peculiar way in which children were offered to him ; nor do we find any traces of either in the Talmud. But — as the scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth century did not fail to note — we have a striking parallel to the Moloch of the Midrash in certain Greek accounts of the child sacrifices of the Carthaginians. The most familiar of these is in Diodorus Siculus, xx. 14, where the author is narrating how the Carthaginians, beaten and besieged by Agathokles, sacrificed to Kronos no less than two hundred boys of the highest birth, while three hundred others voluntarily presented themselves. He continues, ἦν δὲ παρ' αὐτοῖς ἀνδριάς Κρόνου χαλκοῦς, ἐκτετακῶς τὰς χεῖρας ὑπτίας ἐγκεκλιμένος ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, ὥστε τὸν ἐπιτεθέντα τῶν παίδων ἀποκυλίεσθαι καὶ πίπτειν εἰς τι χάσμα πλήρες πυρός. A similar description of the image of Kronos is

⁴ According to Rashi, of copper.

⁵ The series of offerings is here : fine flour, turtle doves or young pigeons, a lamb, a ram, a calf, a bull, a son.

⁶ See also Kimchi on 2 Ki. 23¹⁰, in whose description both sources seem to be used.

preserved in the scholia to Plato's *Republic*, i. 337 A, on the words ἀνεκάγχασέ τε μάλα Σαρδάνιον (ed. Bekker, vol. ix., p. 68): Κλείταρχος δὲ φησι τοὺς Φοίνικας, καὶ μάλιστα Καρχηδονίους, τὸν Κρόνον τιμῶντας, ἐπὶ πάντων μεγάλου κατατυχεῖν σπεύδουσιν, εὐχεσθαι καθ' ἑνὸς τῶν παιδῶν, εἰ περιγένοιτο τῶν ἐπιθυμηθέντων, καθαγαλῖν αὐτὸν τῷ θεῷ. τοῦ δὲ Κρόνου χαλκοῦ παρ' αὐτοῖς ἐστῶτος, τὰς χεῖρας ὑπτίας ἐκτετακότες ὑπὲρ κριβάνου χαλκοῦ, τοῦτον ἐκκαίειν τὸ παιδίον. τῆς δὲ φλογὸς τοῦ ἐκκαιομένου πρὸς τὸ σῶμα ἐμπιπτούσης, συνέλκεσθαί τε τὰ μέλη, καὶ τὸ στόμα σεσηρὸς φαίνεσθαι τοῖς γελῶσι παραπλησίως, ὥς ἂν συσπασθῆν εἰς τὸν κριβανὸν παρολίσθη. In briefer form Suidas and Photius (s.v. Σαρδάνιος [οἱ Σαρδόνιος] γέλως) have the same description in the name of Kleitarchos. Kleitarchos, then, one of the popular biographers of Alexander the Great, who wrote probably ca. 310–300 B.C., is the oldest author to whom we can trace the description of the image of Kronos. The passage in Diodorus xx. 14 is very probably taken by him from Duris of Samos in his history of Agathokles, written ca. 280 B.C.⁷; but a comparison of this passage with that from Kleitarchos makes it clear that the latter is the remoter source of the description which Diodorus copied; the change of Kleitarchos' κριβανὸν into a χάσμα πλῆρες πυρός is made for the sake of bringing in the quotation from Euripides which follows.

There is a passage in Plutarch, *De Superstitione*, c. 13, which in another way presents a parallel to the Jewish description of the worship of Moloch. The Carthaginians, he says, used to sacrifice their own children, and those who had no offspring of their own used to buy children from the poor and slaughter them, as if they were lambs or birds. The mother stood by, unmoved, without a groan; if she groaned or wept, she lost the price, but the child was sacrificed none the less; κρότου δὲ κατεπίμπλατο πάντα πρὸ τοῦ ἀγάλματος ἐπαυλούτων καὶ τυμπανιζόντων, ἕνεκα τοῦ μὴ γενέσθαι τὴν βόησιν τῶν θρήνων ἐξάκουστον.

It is hardly conceivable that the description of the idol of Moloch at Jerusalem, with his outstretched and upturned hands in which the

⁷ The reasons for supposing that Duris is Diodorus' source here may be briefly stated: In the history of Agathokles, Books xix., xx., Diodorus draws chiefly, if not exclusively, on Timaeus and Duris; Timaeus is here excluded, because the same paroemiographic tradition which has preserved the extract from Kleitarchos adduces Timaeus for an entirely different explanation of the Σαρδάνιος γέλως. On the other hand, the way in which the quotation from Euripides (*Iphig. Taur.* 625 f.) and the myth of Kronos devouring his children are brought in is altogether in the manner of Duris, the extant fragments of whose works (*FHG.* ii. 466 ff.) show a notable fondness for such embellishments.

victim was roasted to death (over a furnace, Echa rab.), while the priests drowned its cries with noise of drums or loud shouts, is independent of these Greek stories, — that the striking coincidences are purely accidental. It is far more probable that the authors of the Midrash borrowed their notions of Moloch and his worship from Greek sources. The Old Testament represents the offering of children by fire to Moloch as one of the enormities of the Canaanites; what more natural than that, when Jewish scholars came upon accounts of the sacrifices of the (Canaanite) Carthaginians such as we have read, they should take them for authentic descriptions of the Moloch worship at Jerusalem?⁸ Through what channels the Greek story came to them, it is of course impossible to tell. But it may be worth while to remark that Kleitarchos' account had, so far as we can judge, unusually wide currency from the fact that it gave an historico-etymological explanation of the proverbial 'sardonic laughter.' It has been preserved to us in the paroemiographic tradition, from which the Plato scholion quoted above is itself derived.⁹

The Greek story itself is perhaps a pseudo-historical variation of an older myth, referred to by Simonides and Sophocles. The paroemiographers put by the side of Kleitarchos' explanation of the *Σαρδάνιος γέλως* the myth of Talos, the brazen giant made by Hephaistos, who guarded the island of Crete for Minos, and destroyed intruders by clasping them in his burning embrace, having first made himself hot by leaping into the fire.¹⁰ Some older scholars were inclined to think that this myth grew out of actual human sacrifices to a 'Phoenician Moloch' such as are described in Diodorus. The converse is more probably the true relation. It is curious to note that several of the writers who describe the idol of Moloch at Jerusalem after a Lyra imagine that the arms of the image were drawn up and the victim pressed to its breast.¹¹

⁸ Observe the juxtaposition into which Euseb. *Praep. evang.* iv. 16, 24-26, brings Diod. xx. 14 with the child sacrifices of the Canaanitized Israelites, Ps. 105³⁷⁻³⁹.

⁹ Note the name of Tarraios a little further down. On the relation of the scholia to the writers on proverbs, see Leutsch and Schneidewin, *Paroemiographi Graeci*, Praef., p. xiv ff.

¹⁰ See Eustath. on Od. xx. 302 (p. 1893); Schol. on Plato, *Rep.* l. s. c.; Photius; Suidas; Zenobius, Cent. v. prov. 85; Apollon. *Argon.* iv. 1638 ff.; D. L. Mercklin, *Die Talos-Sage und das Sardonsche Lachen*, 1851 °; Boettiger, *Ideen zur Kunstmythologie* i. 358, 380.

¹¹ So Dietzsch in Ugolini, *Thes.* xxiii. 868; Ziegler, *ib.* 903; and others.

The calf's head in the younger version of the Midrash may perhaps be due to a confused reminiscence of the Minotaur, which some modern scholars have brought into connection with the myth of Talos. The theory that the figure of the Minotaur was itself borrowed from a Semitic 'Baal-Moloch' is rightly rejected by Helbig (in Roscher, i. 3010 f.).