New Light on the Sacrifice of Isaac from 4Q225

GEZA VERMES
OXFORD FORUM FOR QUMRAN RESEARCH

While I was wading through, in view of the fifth edition of The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, the unexciting scraps of the Book of Jubilees from Qumran Cave 4, I tumbled on 4Q225 and became truly excited. This Hebrew text, represented by medium-size fragments, contains an account similar to the Abraham section of the Book of Jubilees. The editors, J. C. VanderKam and J. T. Milik (Discoveries in the Judaean Desert XIII, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994), have given it the title, "Pseudo-Jubilees", but it may as well be an independent version of the pseudepigraphon previously known from Ethiopic, Greek and Latin translations. Palaeographically the 'Hero-dian' script of 4Q225 is dated to the turn of the era (30 B.C.E.–20 C.E.). The two other 'Pseudo-Jubilees' manuscripts, 4Q226 and 4Q227, the former partly overlapping with 4Q225, are placed by the editors to the second half of the first century B.C.E. The actual composition, just as the traditional form of Jubilees, is likely to have originated in the middle of the second century B.C.E.

Two features of the Ethiopic Jubilees are supplementary to the Genesis 22 story, the intervention of the angel Mastemah and the date assigned to the intended sacrifice, 15 Nisan. Of these the first is paralleled in 4Q225: Mastemah not only initiates the trial of Abraham, but his angels comment on its outcome. By contrast, the date of the sacrifice is missing from the Qumran text. But 4Q225 includes broken references to further midrashic elements (printed in bold letters in the translation): mention of a fire (II, 1); a second address by Isaac (II, 4); reference to weeping holy angels (II, 5); mention of (Isaac's?) sons (II, 6); rejoicing among the angels of Mastemah (II, 7–8); God's comment on Abraham (II, 10); God's blessing of Isaac (II, 10–11); and chronological details (II, 12). The identity of several of these references is successfully determined by the editors with the help of targumic and midrashic parallels. The impact of these on the ongoing debate on the interpretation of the Binding of Isaac and their possible influence on the New Testament theology of the cross has either escaped the editors or they did not consider them relevant to their editorial work.

1 The volume in fact did not appear until the summer of 1995.
3 Cf. HJP III, 312–313.
4 Jub. 17:15–16.
5 The decision to order the test occurred on the 12th of the first month (Jub. 17:15) and the site of the sacrifice was reached on the third day, i.e. 15 Nisan (Jub. 18:3).
6 The editors deserve credit for their efforts even though their handling of the non-Qumran evidence is occasionally somewhat clumsy.
NEW LIGHT ON THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC FROM 4Q225

The appropriate part of the manuscript is reproduced here. The editors have filled most of the gaps in the text from Gen. 22 and their reconstructions appear generally reasonable. However, I have deleted their purely hypothetical completion of the phrases which are without biblical parallels. Both the translation and the annotation are mine.

4Q225

[Transcribed text]

Annotated Translation

I ... (8) And a son was born afterwards (9) [to Abraham] and he called his name Isaac. And the prince Ma[s]temah came (10) [to God] and accused Abraham on account of Isaac.7 And [God] said (11) [to Abraham], ‘Take your son, Isaac, [your] only (son) (12) [whom] you [love] and offer him to me as a burnt offering on one of the ... mountains (13) [which I will tell]

7 God is to test Abraham because Prince Mastemah accuses the patriarch on account of Isaac. This is an abridged version of Jub. 17:15–18:1: on hearing the heavenly praises of Abraham for his love of God and faithfulness in trials, Mastemah suggests to God the idea of ordering Abraham, who was doting on Isaac, to sacrifice his son. God was certain that Abraham would pass the test as he had been faithful on all the previous occasions. Hence the command taken from Gen. 22:2.
you.' And he ro[se and he we]n[†] from the wells8 to Mo[unt Moriah]. (14) ... And Ab[raham] lifted up II (1) his [eyes]9 and behold there was a fire.10 And he placed [the wood on Isaac, his son, and they went together]. (2) And Isaac said to Abraham, [his father, 'Behold there is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb] (3) for the burnt offering?' And Abraham said to [Isaac, his son, 'God will provide a lamb] (4) for himself.'11 Isaac said to his father, 'B[ind my hands] . . . '12 . . . (5) the holy angels standing (and) weeping over13 . . . (6) his sons from the earth.14 And the angels of M[astemah] . . . (7) were rejoicing and saying,'15 'Now he (Isaac) will be destroyed . . . (8) whether he16 will be found weak17 and whether A[braham] will be found unfaithful [to God. And he (God)18 called.] (9) 'Abraham, Abraham.' And he said, 'Here am I.' And he said, ' . . . (10) he (Abraham) is not a lover (of God).'.19 And the Lord

8 The author possibly interprets Beer Sheba as seven wells.
9 Since 1, 14 ends with 'And Abraham lifted up', the reconstruction of the damaged beginning of Col. II is bound to be 'his eyes' (cf. Gen. 22:4).
10 After a short lacuna, the reading וַיְהִי clear. The editors remark that Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (PsJ) on Gen. 22:4 helps to understand this reference to 'fire'. PsJ speaks of a 'cloud of glory' (i.e. a shining cloud) identifying the mountain. (Cf. also Gen. Rabbah 56:1–2, where it is specified that the vision of a cloud was observed by both Abraham and Isaac. GV) Better still, Pirque de-R. Eliezer 105 reads: 'He saw a pillar of fire (יהיה והר רדום) (rising) from the earth to heaven.'
11 The text of lines 1–4 is inspired by an abridged version of Gen. 22:4–8. There seems to be no room for the reference to the two servants or the knife.
12 This speech by Isaac is lacking in Gen. 22. By contrast, as the editors note, the targumic account (PsJ, Neofiti (=N), and Fragmentary Targum (=FT), GV) as well as Gen. R. 56:8 (not 7 as in DJD) testify to such an additional speech by Isaac. Of Isaac’s opening word only a single letter, clearly a kaph, is legible in 4Q225, but there is space for 15 more letters. However, all the Targums begin with the imperative תָּמַך (‘Bind my hands properly’). Cf. also Gen. R. 56:7, תָּמַך תָּמַך (‘Bind me very well’). Hence the reconstruction תָּמַך proposed by the editors enjoys an extremely high degree of probability, but I consider תָּמַך תָּמַך (cf. Targums) more likely than תָּמַך תָּמַך since תָּמַך-suffix is unattested in 4QJubilees and Ps. Jubilees.
13 No presence of the holy angels is found in the biblical version of the sacrifice of Isaac. But it is a standard feature in the Palestinian Targums. The editors cite PsJ on Gen. 22:10 (‘The eyes of Isaac were looking on the angels on high’; cf. also FT and N, GV) and Gen. R. 56:5 and 7, both passages alluding to the weeping or tears of the ministering angels.
14 The Targums (on Gen. 22:14) and Gen. R. 56:10 associate the sacrifice with the future deliverance of the children of Isaac from all distress. The phrase ‘not allowing Mastemah to destroy’ his sons from the earth may have a similar connotation.
15 Mastemah’s party rejoices in the prospect of Isaac’s death.
16 Probably Isaac, unable to live up to his intention to serve as the victim of the sacrifice. Mastemah’s clever strategem was intended to lead either to discrediting Abraham or Isaac, or to the destruction of the ‘son of the promise’.
17 חבל may mean ‘false’ as opposite to ‘faithful’, thus alluding to Abraham. This is however unlikely because of the mention of A[braham] five words further on. חבל has also the sense of ‘failing’ or ‘meagre’ (as opposed to ‘firm’ or ‘strong’), in which case the self-sacrificing Isaac may be the subject.
18 The editors imply that the caller is Mastemah. In Gen. 22:11 the speaker is ‘the Angel of the Lord’, i.e. God himself. There is no reason to suppose that 4Q225 has changed the subject.
19 The editors assume that Mastemah is still speaking and propose the odd-sounding and far too short reconstruction, ‘Now I know that] he will not be loving.’ The missing words are more likely to be those of God to Mastemah, e.g. ‘Now I know that you have lied that he is not a lover (of God).’ Gen. R. 56:7 positively formulates the statement: ‘I have made it known to all that you (Abraham) love me.’
God blessed Isaac20 all the days of his life (cf. 4Q226 7.3) and he begot] (11) Jacob, and Jacob begot Levi (in the) [third (cf. 4Q226 7.4)] genera[tion. And all] (12) the days of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Lev[i] were . . . years.

4Q225 and the History of the Early Exegesis of Genesis 22

The interpretation of the biblical account of the sacrifice of Isaac in rabbinic literature and its possible impact on the New Testament received only scant attention in the course of the first half of the twentieth century.21 The most comprehensive study, that of Spiegel, was prevented for about two decades by the fact that it was written in Hebrew from making the impact to which it was entitled. It was only after its translation into English by Judah Goldin that it began to be noticed in theological circles.22 The closing chapter of my Scripture and Tradition in Judaism, 'Redemption and Genesis XXII: The Binding of Isaac and the Sacrifice of Jesus' (Leiden, 1961, 193–227), re-opened the debate and was followed by a number of fresh attempts to investigate the issue.23

The chief findings I arrived at were as follows. (1) The simplest form of the exegetical tradition concerning Gen. 22 is attested in the Palestinian Targums in the narrative form of a 're-written Bible'. Its distinctive features are that (a) Isaac was informed of his role as a victim; (b) he gave his consent and asked to be bound; (c) he was favoured with a vision of angels; and (d) God was to remember the binding of Isaac in favour of his descendants.24 Supplementary details are include in PsJ on Gen. 22:1 and 4, namely the adult Isaac's age (37 years) and the vision of a cloud of glory designating the mountain of the sacrifice. (2) The expanded account of the Aqedah inspired theological reflections recorded in Tannaitic and Amoraic sources.

20 Milik's reading of [םי] seems correct. In Gen. 22:17 Abraham is blessed. The change of subject in 4Q225 corresponds to the stress in early post-biblical exegesis of the story on the positive part played by Isaac in the event.
These relate to the sacrificial character of the Aqedah (allusion to the ashes and blood of Isaac), and to its saving effects. Furthermore the atoning power of the Temple sacrifices is attributed by the rabbis to God’s remembering the sacrifice of Isaac on Mt. Moriah=the Temple Mount. The Aqedah is also associated with one of the principal Jewish feasts, first with Passover on account of the lamb symbolism during the existence of the Temple, and subsequently with New Year and the blowing of the ram’s horn recalling the binding of Isaac.

I further argued that most of the narrative and even some of the speculative traditions are paralleled in the first-century C.E. writings of Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities* I, 222–236, Pseudo-Philo’s *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (*LAB*) 18:5, 32:2–4, 40:2, and in 4 Maccabees 13:12, 16:20, as well as in the second-century B.C.E. Jubilees 17:15, 18:3 (dating the Aqedah to Passover), and that in consequence the essence of the post-biblical rewriting of the story is traceable back to at least the first century C.E., which means that it was current at the time of the formation of the New Testament. These views have found general favour among scholars during the last three decades, with the exception of Philip Davies and Bruce Chilton, who set out in an article published in 1978 to substitute for them ‘a revised tradition history’. I believe that in the light of the evidence from 4Q225 their counter-argument can be finally refuted.

Here are the main items of their thesis. Instead of consisting in Isaac’s conscious, willing and meritorious participation in the sacrifice, the Aqedah was redefined as ‘a haggadic presentation of the vicariously atoning sacrifice of Isaac in which he is said, e.g., to have shed his blood freely and/or to have been reduced to ashes’. In other words, they arbitrarily selected the most advanced theological speculation of the rabbis and then claimed that this constituted the essence of the Aqedah. Next, the supporting external evidence (Josephus, Ps.-Philo and 4 Macc.) adduced by me to argue for the first-century C.E. currency of the Aqedah story was declared to be post-70 C.E. Ps.-Philo and 4 Macc., contrary to mainstream opinion, were dated to 70–135 C.E. *Jewish Antiquities* was dated correctly to the end of the century, but without taking into account the fact that Josephus regularly echoes traditional views. Such a revised chronology serves as a precondition for the

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27 *FT* and PsJ on Lev. 22:27. For Mt. Moriah=Temple Mount, see 2 Chron. 3:1; Jub. 18:13; *Jos. Ant.* I, 226.
28 *PT* on Ex. 12:42; Mekh. I, 57, 88.
29 b*Rosh ha-Shanah* 16a.
32 P. R. Davies and B. D. Chilton, see n. 22. For the separate responsibilities of the co-authors, see Chilton, *Targumic Approaches* (cf. n. 23 above), 47, n. 1.
33 *CBQ*, 515.
34 As regards 4 Macc., Martin Goodman, having provided linguistic and historical arguments in favour of the commonly held date, concludes that ‘suggestions of a date in the early second century (Dupont-Sommer; Breitenstein) should be dismissed’. Cf. *HJP III* (1986), 591.
blunt assertion that 'the Aqedah was invented [my emphasis] by the Rabbis', mostly Amoraim, who 'went so far as to appropriate details of the Passion\textsuperscript{35} to heighten the drama of Isaac's Offering and to deny thereby the uniqueness of Jesus' offering' (my emphasis).\textsuperscript{36} Finally, it was maintained that the Aqedah doctrine was introduced to replace the Tamid lamb offering, discontinued after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., by the symbolical sacrifice of Isaac,\textsuperscript{37} and that the shift of emphasis from Abraham to Isaac, as well as most details of the targumic presentation of Gen. 22, had a rabbinic, and predominantly fourth-century C.E. Amoraic, provenance.

I have never felt that this 'revised tradition history' demanded an actual refutation, though others did issue firm and in my opinion convincing rebuttals.\textsuperscript{38} But now, seventeen years after its publication, along came 4Q225, this apparently harmless scrap of manuscript, which by revealing the pre-Christian skeleton of the targumic-midrashic representation of the sacrifice of Isaac, has rendered the hypothesis of an Amoraic origin of the Aqedah at least highly improbable. Hence, without further ado, I move to my peroration in the form of a chronologically arranged synoptic table of the exegetical evidence assembled in the foregoing pages.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{35} This is a hint at Gen. R. 56:3. 'It comes as a shock when we hear the Amoraim compare Isaac to a condemned man bearing his cross.' Cf. art. cit. 539 and n. 68, where E. R. Goodenough is quoted as observing: 'This detail so strikingly brings to mind the crucifixion of Jesus that it seems impossible that there was no relationship.' As though Jesus had been the only crucified person who had to carry the cross to the place of crucifixion! The \textit{Jewish Encyclopedia} (1905), vol. IV, 368, art. 'Cross', displays common sense: '(Crucifixion) was so familiar to the Jews in New Testament times that they spoke frequently of "men carrying their crosses before them while going to be executed".' On the Roman method of crucifixion, which often entailed the carrying of the beam of the cross by the condemned man, cf. Martin Hengel, \textit{Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross} (London, 1977); Art. 'Crucifixion', \textit{Anchor Bible Dictionary} I (1992), 1208–1209.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{CBQ}, 516–517.

\textsuperscript{37} This is an argument made to stand on its head because the midrashic texts unanimously assert that the atoning-redemptive virtue of the lamb sacrifices in the Jerusalem sanctuary derived from the fact that they reminded God of the binding of Isaac.


\textsuperscript{39} Scholars still exercised by the problem of methodology relative to the use of rabbinic literature in New Testament exegesis are invited to consider items 2 and 7 in the table below.
### Synoptic Table

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<th>B.C.E.</th>
<th>1st C.E.</th>
<th>PT</th>
<th>Tan</th>
<th>Amor/later</th>
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<td>PsJ/FT/N</td>
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<td>PsJ</td>
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<td>12. Isaac’s blood/ashes</td>
<td>LAB</td>
<td>Sifra</td>
<td>GenR/ybTaan</td>
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