

ACTAR

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

APPRECIATING the importance of Dr. Reik's work, I made a translation from the first German edition some years ago, and Mr. L. C. Martin was good enough to revise it at the time. As I was unable to publish it then it was laid aside, but the delay thus incurred has the advantage of allowing me to make use of the second, revised and enlarged German edition which in the meantime appeared. This final draft has been revised by Mrs. James Strachey and Mr. Roger Money-Kyrle. I count myself fortunate in obtaining such competent assistance, and I wish to express my gratitude to those who have so generously rendered it.

DOUGLAS BRYAN

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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS
OF RELIGION

— I —

RITUAL
PSYCHO-ANALYTIC STUDIES

BY
THEODOR REIK

WITH A PREFACE
BY
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TRANSLATED FROM THE SECOND GERMAN EDITION
BY
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We may now briefly refer to the fact that the number (two) of the tablets is identical with that of the animals worshipped by the Jews. Moses, who has identified himself with the animal-god, is worshipped as a calf, the young of the bull, and has perhaps become in the form of a stone also the image of the original god. The breaking of the stones, like the destruction of the calf, would signify self-destruction in the service of unconscious self-punitive tendencies.

Our investigation has shown us that the numerous contradictions and uncertainties of the text are expressions of unconscious knowledge of and reaction to the real content of the saga. The appearance at one time of Jahve and at another of Moses as the writer of the tablets illustrates the oscillation between father-god and son-god. The uncertainty about what was on the tablets, as to how the inscriptions were distributed, in what writing it was transcribed, etc., point to the fact that the doubt aroused by the ambivalence extended to substitutive objects and activities; it is a sure sign that the original nature of the stones has unconsciously remained known. The construction of new tablets which Moses made at God's command to replace the broken ones is not only a continuation of the misleading tradition, but comprises the victory and the re-establishment of the domination of the destroyed father-god. The return to the *status quo ante* indicates that the love, increased by the reaction of remorse and feelings of guilt, has become overwhelming, just as the Biblical legend, in which the events as a whole are finally handed down, enables us to recognise the exclusiveness of Jahve as God.

It must be noted here that the gifted author of the study of the Moses of Michelangelo, which we have already quoted, had already recognised as essential the same traits in the statue as those which stand out in the

son-god the crime which they once committed against the father, and the same hostile and defiant impulses will be aroused against him. The eating of the calf only takes the place of that of the bull as the eating of the body of Christ in the Last Supper continues the old totem meal in which the tribe partook of the flesh of the divine father.

present analytic interpretation of the Biblical tradition. The gesture of Michelangelo's hero, whose finger is buried in his beard, he has described as the sign of a relinquished movement directed masochistically against himself, and suggests that the powerful store of feeling which rages in the leader's breast is hushed by the memory of his mission. In yet another detail the same author has perceived the psychological mechanism, namely, in the fact that Moses reverses the holy tablets and holds them upside down. We may recall that our surprise at the treatment of the holy stones was the starting-point of our interpretation of the episode. We have found the essence of the events of Sinai in the suppression and rejection of rebellious tendencies against God, and in the victory of the conscious impulses of love over the unconscious feelings of hate and rage. According to the testimony of this author, Michelangelo's statue represents the renunciation of the gratification of the individual's strong affects in the service of a higher idea.

We must now endeavour to reply to certain objections. It will be said that our interpretation, as far as it proceeds from the Sinai report, may be a probable one, but that it contradicts the religious *niveau* of Judaism reached at that time. Where, it will be asked, are found traces of Jewish homage to a stone fetish? Our reply is that the religious views of a people at any particular stage are never completely free from memories of earlier ideas; and, further, that the expression, fetish, does not seem appropriate here. Robertson Smith¹ has already rejected the designation fetishism from the worship of holy stones as 'a popular term, which conveys no precise idea, but is vaguely supposed to mean something very savage and contemptible. And no doubt the worship of unshapen blocks is, from the artistic point of view, a very poor thing, but from a purely religious point of view, its inferiority to image worship is not so evident. The host in the mass is artistically as much inferior to the Venus of Milo as a Semitic *Maşşēba* was, but no one

¹ *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, London, 1901, p. 209.

will say that mediæval Christianity is a lower form of religion than Aphrodite worship.' The holy pillar of stone is in general widely spread among the Semites. The *Maşşēba* may be justly denoted as the first and the most primitive prototype of the altar. The sacred stones mentioned by Herodotus are called *ansab* (sing. *noşb*), *i.e.* stones set up, pillars. Such monolithic pillars or stone heaps are constantly mentioned in the oldest part of the Scriptures.¹ The Pentateuchal law condemns the use of these pillars as idolatrous. The religious significance of the *Maşşēba* can be inferred from the fact that it was originally considered as God by the Canaanites and Hebrews. The stone erected by Jacob was not thought of as a boundary stone but as an image of God, since it is anointed, and the place where it stood is called 'God's house'.² In the primitive religion of the Israelites the stone, like the altar in later Judaism, was smeared with blood. When in certain parts of the Bible one or several stones appear as testimony of a bond, we should not think of them in the modern sense as memorials, but take the statements quite seriously; the stone as God was made a witness. This meaning is not incompatible with the later appearance of Jahve and the stone side by side as isolated and quite independent concepts, as, for instance, when Joshua calls the stone to witness at the conclusion of the bond in Sichem, 'For it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us'.³ This duplication of the idea of God, like the double presence of God in the sacrificial cult, can only be explained historically. The former identity of the two later separate images of God is proved by the designation צֶרֶף 'rock' for God, by numerous other references and by the prophets' rejection of the worship of the *Maşşēba*.⁴ On the

¹ At Sichem: Joshua xxiv. 26; Bethel: Genesis xxviii. 18; Gibeath: Genesis xxxi. 45; Gilgal: Joshua iv. 5; Mizpah: 1 Samuel vii. 12; Gibeon: 2 Samuel xx. 8; En-rogel: 1 Kings i. 9.

² Genesis xxviii. 22.

³ Joshua xxiv. 27.

⁴ The twelve stone pillars erected by Moses at the conclusion of the covenant, Exodus xxiv. 4, for the twelve tribes of Israel, as witnesses, according to the old idea of the solemn deed, are probably identical with the earlier tribal gods.

other hand, many ritual prescriptions become explicable through the regressive discovery of the repressed significance of the stone, and many metaphors and turns of expression in the Old Testament lose their puzzling character.

It may be remarked here that a careful study of stone totemism, which may have been once universal, would lead to surprising results for the science of religion. E. Sidney Hartland believes that 'Many of the menhirs in Europe and Asia Minor have probably been actually figures of deities. Rocks, boulders and standing stones have been worshipped as gods or as inhabited by gods all over the world. Wherever men have been struck by the appearance or position of a rock or stone, they have regarded it with awe as uncanny, and in innumerable cases they have ultimately erected it into a divinity, brought offerings, and put up prayers before it. Instances need not be cited; they are found in every quarter of the globe.'¹

The much-discussed metaphor,² 'Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you,' becomes intelligible in virtue of the original identity of stone, human being and anthropomorphic deity in the primitive mental life. The psychoanalytic theory of the genesis of sexual symbolism finds a brilliant confirmation in this prophetic metaphor, which shows irrefutably that what to-day appears as a symbol is only a remnant of former conceptual and linguistic identity.

The reconstruction of the original significance of the holy stones becomes important for the elucidation of obscure problems of the cult. This is best seen in the development of the altar. In the old law³ it is prescribed that the altar shall be built out of earth or unhewn stones. Robertson Smith⁴ has already recognised that

¹ James Hastings, *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. ii., Edinburgh, 1920, p. 864.

² Isaiah li. 1-2.

³ Exodus xx. 24-25, and 1 Samuel xiv. 32.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 201.

the table on which the victim was to be offered up to the Deity cannot possibly be regarded as the origin of the altar, since 'the table is not a very primitive article of furniture'. This keen scholar has expressed the opinion that 'the altar is only a modification of the *nošb*, and that the rude Arabian usage is the primitive type out of which all the elaborate altar ceremonies of the more cultivated Semites grew'. We cannot pursue here the very complicated and not easily perceptible development of the stone altar; we only wish to point out that our explanation might be made the starting-point for such an investigation.

The prohibition¹ against making use of hewn stone for the building of the altar ('For if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou has polluted it') shows an old taboo to prevent injury to the Deity still evident in a later prescription of the cult. It is as though the hewing of a stone were equivalent to an injury of the Deity who originally was the stone itself and later was represented as living in the stone.² The blood of the victim consecrated to the god was smeared on the altar. In this primitive form of giving nourishment, the Deity appears more convincing and nearer to nature than later when the origin of the altar in a primitive stone-god had been forgotten. If the path which leads from the crude stone to the imposing and richly decorated altar were pursued, a light would be thrown on a significant element in the historical development of civilisation, provided the important rôle of the stone-god were fully appreciated.

One detail which should bring us back to our starting-point shows how necessary it is to supplement the genetic method of research by that of folk-psychology. Here again only the use of psycho-analytic methods and

¹ Exodus xx. 25.

² How far contemporary Biblical exegesis is from recognising the really effective mechanisms of mental life is shown by Baentsch's explanation (*Hand-kommentar zu Exodus*, S. 188), according to which the prohibition to use stones worked with iron for the altar shows a hostility to culture surviving from nomadic times. Analytic investigation, on the contrary, shows that the prohibition is a reflection of the earlier one against killing the Deity, originally the father, which marks the beginning of cultural evolution.

conclusions can lead to deeper knowledge and render intelligible the original significance of elements in the mental life of the people which have become unconscious.

The horns of the altar, on which the blood of the victim was smeared and which were looked upon as affording protection,¹ have been explained in the most diverse ways. Kautzsch² has stated that it is extremely probable that the horns go back to the custom of spreading the skin of the animal victim together with the horns over the altar. Baentsch³ holds a similar view, and adds that it scarcely agrees with the representation of the Deity in the form of an animal. Wolf Baudissin⁴ supposes that 'this decoration may perhaps be explained from the fact that horned animals were sacrificed on the altar; or possibly the horns have merely the practical purpose of forming a handle for those beseeching protection by which they may take hold of the altar'. We are certainly little inclined to accept so rationalistic an explanation. It contradicts above all the rôle of the horns in the sacrificial ritual, which is quite disregarded in Baudissin's second explanation, and in the first is not brought into any psychologically sufficient relationship to this constituent part of the altar. Neither the æsthetic hypothesis of the horns as a decoration, nor the purely practical one which interprets them as a sort of divine clothes-pegs, will fit the primitiveness of the views of that period.

Our interpretation enables us to make an attempt to explain this detail in the cult which, as I think, is as well suited to the psychological as to the historical development. When a little child puts on a soldier's helmet he does so by no means as a game, without seriousness or emotion; he means rather, 'I am a soldier'. The altar which bears the horns of the ram was, therefore, originally identified with the ram, the old totem-god. We have

¹ 1 Kings i. 50, ii. 28.

² Karl Kautzsch, *Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Tübingen, 1911, S. 26.

³ *Ibid.* S. 234.

⁴ In the *Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie*, etc.

expressed the opinion that a totem stone was worshipped as god, together with—more probably after—the totem animal. The altar which later developed from the holy stone still bears the most important totem of the animal-god, and bears it at a time which had long since advanced to the cult of Jahve. A remnant of the repressed totem still projects into a period which is proud of the cultural height to which it has attained. But the horns were still considered to be the vital elements of the altar, and such a significant displacement on to a trifling thing, a displacement so similar to that found in neurotic symptoms, is unintelligible without the psycho-analytic investigation of the psychical processes. In spite of all later developments, we can state on the basis of this feature that the stone once had divine significance, that the stone was once really God.¹

After a long journey we have again arrived at the horns, the totem of the prehistoric totem-god which became the symbol of the power and awfulness of this primitive god. We have again found them in the old Israelitish altar structure and in the shofar ritual, and we believe that, although the people have long abandoned totem worship, their significance is unconsciously determined by their original character, for the interpretation of Michelangelo's masterpiece has shown the significance and affective value which they retain for the spectators' unconscious.

Our analysis of the Sinai legend has not brought us a complete understanding of the events which, owing to

¹ The keeping of the tablets in the Ark is explicable in view of this earliest meaning of the holy stone and from comparison with similar cults of the ancient Orient. It goes without saying that the prehistoric worship of holy stones was not confined to these Jews. The part played by holy stones among the Arabs, and the custom of fondling and kissing such stones, is to be traced back, like the worship of the Kaaba, to their primary divinity. Holy stones were known in the Phœnician temples. The stone pillars of Melkart in the temple at Tyre represented Heracles. Similarly, the two pillars of the temple of Solomon were originally images of gods. The Hermes in Greece, the lingam stones in India, and the holy stones appearing in the religion of the American and Australian uncivilised peoples point to the conclusion that the cult of the stone has represented a transitional stage in all religions. Perhaps the pillars in the Greek temples may derive their elevation and magnificence from a far less conspicuous stone which was once the object of divine worship.

*Missionary
see 172-173
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the choice of the religion of Jahve, became of decisive importance in the history of the world. However, we have formed a dim conception of what is really essential in the process which culminated in Jahve's proclamation that he alone is the God of Israel and that Israel is His chosen people. The covenant between Jahve and the Jews, with which the peculiar fate of the Jews and their belief that they are the chosen people was to be bound up, was founded on the repression of the strongest unconscious affects. Without a knowledge of the deciding factors there can be no understanding of the problems of the Jewish religion.

Here ends our task, which was to indicate a new path for the science of religion leading to an unknown realm. We greet the truth which we see rising before us, as Moses, who dimly saw the Promised Land from Mount Nebo, and yearned for it from afar.

he is best known for his voluminous homilies and commentaries on the Bible which were greatly influenced by Isaac ABRAVANEL. His interpretations tend to the allegorical as a compromise between the rationalist and esoteric approaches to textual commentary.

ALTAR: Structure on which SACRIFICES are offered. Found among most ancient peoples, it is first mentioned in the Bible when Noah built an a. after being saved from the Flood (Gen. 8:20). Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses built altars as an expression of thanksgiving or in order to mark a significant occasion, e.g., upon entering into a covenant with God (Exod. 24:4). According to the Bible (Exod. 20:21-23) the a. was to be made of a mound of earth. If made of stones, they had to be untouched by iron since this metal represented bloodshed and weapons of war. It was furthermore forbidden to ascend the a. by steps (Exod. 20:26) or to follow the idolatrous custom of planting trees around it (Deut. 16:21). Specifications were laid down for the portable a. of the desert sanctuary, made of wood and overlaid with bronze, measuring 5×5×3 cubits; it had four corners or "horns". Another a. overlaid with gold, measuring 1×1×2 cubits, served for incense. When Joshua crossed the Jordan he built an a. of stones upon which he inscribed "the second Law of Moses" (Josh. 8:30-32). During the period of the Judges and Kings numerous local altars ("HIGH PLACES") existed. The command for one central a. is formulated in Deut. 12:5-14, and the historical books of the Bible as well as rabbinic tradition assume that all altars except the one in God's chosen sanctuary (i.e., in Jerusalem after the building of Solomon's temple) were illegal. According to the biblical account, Solomon's a. measured 20×20×10 cubits (II Chron. 4:1). The golden incense a. was also installed (I Kings 7:48). Upon the division of the Monarchy the Israelite kings waged a schismatic struggle against the central a. at Jerusalem. According to the Talmud, the only legitimate a. outside the Temple precincts was that of 12 stones (symbolizing the unity of the tribes) built by Elijah in order to vindicate the lordship of God against the priests of Baal. Upon their return from Babylonian Exile, the Jews erected an a. before rebuilding the Temple. The sanctity of the a. made it a haven for the unintentional manslayer who traditionally seized the "horns" at the corners of the a. (see ASYLUM). In the Second Temple Period the a. was the focus of popular piety, and during the Feast of Tabernacles in particular, it was the center of great rejoicing during the ritual of circumambulation. When the Second Temple was laid waste Johanan ben Zakkai comforted his colleagues saying: "You have another means of atonement as powerful as the a., and that is the

work of charity, for it is said: 'I desired mercy and not sacrifice' (Hos. 6:6)." The detailed description of the a. found in the Bible served as the basis for allegorical and mystical elaboration in later aggadic and kabbalistic literature.

ALTER OF GUR, see GER

AM HA-ARETZ (Heb. "People of the Land") 1)

In biblical usage — the mass of indigenous population as distinct from the noble class. 2) After the first Exile — part of the rural population who had remained in their homeland and assimilated with the surrounding peoples. 3) In the Talmud — a vulgar part of the people, lax in religious observance, particularly with regard to tithes and ritual purity. 4) In later parlance — an ignoramus. The copious though varied references to the A.H. in the Talmud stem from the beginning of the Second Temple Period when Ezra and Nehemiah decreed the separation of the homecoming exiles from the lawless "Ammei Ha-Aratzot" (pl.). In the subsequent period of the Great Synagogue this separation led to the formation of the Hasidim — the pious — or *Perushim* (PHARISEES) — those setting themselves apart. These in turn formed associations of the strictly observant called *Haverim* for the protection and furtherance of the Pharisaic interpretation of the *Torah*. The ensuing antagonism between the opposing factions is attested by R. Akiva's confession that while still an A.H. he was eager to break the bones of the learned "like those of an ass". The growing estrangement between learned Pharisee and ignorant A.H. is considered to have provided a fertile ground for early Christendom. Talmudic definitions of an A.H. vary: He is one who does not give the tithes as prescribed or one unobservant of the laws of purity, or one who does not read the *Shema* twice a day. Others see in him one who spurns the laws of *tzitzit*, *mezuzah*, or *tephillin*, or a father who fails to instruct his sons in *Torah*. Extenuating or even sympathetic consideration of the A.H. is also to be found in the Talmud despite the prevailing intergroup friction; one such utterance even bids "Heed the sons of the A.H. for they will be the living source of the *Torah*."

AMALEK: Ancient nomadic people who lived in the Sinai desert between Egypt and the land of Canaan. According to the Bible (Gen. 36:12) they were of Edomite stock. At Rephidim, the Children of Israel — then on their way from Egypt to Mt. Sinai — were treacherously attacked by Amalekites whom they repelled after a battle of varying fortunes. Thereafter A. was regarded as Israel's inveterate foe whose annihilation became a sacred obligation (Exod. 17:16; Deut. 25:19), and once performed was to be remembered as a religious duty at least once a year (on the Sabbath preceding PURIM; see SABBATHS, SPECIAL). Saul's failure

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