SVENSK EXEGETISK ÅRSBOK

78

På uppdrag av

Svenska Exegetiska Sällskapet

utgiven av

Samuel Byrskog

Uppsala 2013

Svenska Exegetiska Sällskapet
c/o Teologiska Institutionen
Box 511, S-751 20 UPPSALA, Sverige
WWW: http://www.exegetiskasallskapet.se/

Utgivare:
Samuel Byrskog (samuel.byrskog@teol.lu.se)

Redaktionssekreterare:
Thomas Kazen –2013 (thomas.kazen@ths.se)
Tobias Hägerland 2014– (tobias.hagerland@teol.lu.se)

Recensionsansvarig:
Tobias Hägerland –2013 (tobias.hagerland@teol.lu.se)
Rosmari Lillas-Schuil 2014– (rosmari.lillas@gu.se)

Redaktionskommitté:
Samuel Byrskog (samuel.byrskog@teol.lu.se)
Göran Eidevall (goran.eidevall@teol.uu.se)
Blazenka Scheuer (blazenka.scheuer@teol.lu.se)
Cecilia Wassén (cecilia.wassen@teol.uu.se)

Prenumerationspriser:
Sverige: SEK 250 (studenter SEK 150)
Övriga världen: SEK 350

SEÅ beställs hos Svenska Exegetiska Sällskapet via hemsidan eller postadress ovan, eller hos Bokrondellen (www.bokrondellen.se). Anvisningar för medverkande återfinns på hemsidan eller erhålls från redaktionssekreteraren. Manusstopp är 1 mars.

Utgiven med bidrag från Kungliga humanistiska vetenskapssamfundet i Lund, samt Thora Olssons stiftelse.

Tidskriften är indexerad i Libris databas (www.kb.se/libris/).

SEÅ may be ordered from Svenska Exegetiska Sällskapet either through the homepage or at the postal address above. In North America, however, SEÅ should be ordered from Eisenbrauns (www.eisenbrauns.com). Search under the title "Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok." Instructions for contributors are found on the homepage or may be requested from the editorial secretary (tobias hagerland@teol.lu.se).

This periodical is indexed in the ATLA Religion Database®, published by the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606; E-mail: atla@atla.com; WWW: https://www.atla.com/.

ISSN 1100-2298
Uppsala 2013
Tryck: Elanders, Vällingby

Innehåll

Exegetiska dagen 2012/Exegetical Day 2012

Övriga artiklar/Other articles

Recensioner/Book Reviews

****

Medarbetare i denna årgång/Contributors in this issue:

Göran Eidevall — goran.eidevall@teol.uu.se
Gunnel Ekroth — gunnel.ekroth@teol.uu.se
Stephen Finlan — sfinlan@bu.edu
Josef Forsling — josef.forsling@ths.se
Birger Gerhardsson — kob.gerhardsson@comhem.se
William K. Gilders — wgilder@emory.edu
Hallvard Hagelia — hagelia@ansgarskolen.no
Bengt Holmberg — bengt.holmberg@teol.lu.se
Thomas Kazen — thomas.kazen@ths.se
Miriam Kjellgren — miriamkjellgren@yahoo.com
Corinna Körting — corinna.koerting@uni-hamburg.de
Torsten Löfstedt — torsten.lofstedt@lnu.se
Kari Syreeni — kari.syreeni@abo.fi
Ola Wikander — ola.wikander@teol.lu.se

Rejected Sacrifice in the Prophetic Literature: A Rhetorical Perspective

GÖRAN EIDEVALL (UPPSALA UNIVERSITY)

On the whole, the texts in the Hebrew Bible display a positive attitude toward the sacrificial cult, at least as long as offerings are brought to YHWH alone and not to any other deity. For instance, a large part of the book of Leviticus, the centerpiece of the Pentateuch, consists of passages that both describe and prescribe sacrificial offerings.[1] In other words, a strong affirmation of the temple cult is found at the very heart of Torah. In addition, it would be possible to cite many texts from other parts of the HB which express or presuppose a positive view of sacrifice as part of legitimate worship.[2]

However, there are some notable exceptions, a few discordant voices in the choir. I am referring to the so-called cult-critical passages in the prophetic literature (e.g., Isa 1:10–17; Jer 6:20; 7:21; Hos 6:6; Amos 4:4–5; 5:21–24; Micah 6:6–8). Apparently, some of the prophets, on some occasions, declared that their god, YHWH, rejected the sacrifices that the worshippers were offering. In this paper, I will focus on two of these texts – arguably the two most radical and detailed cases of this type of prophetic critique: Amos 5:21–24 and Isa 1:11–15.

Total rejection or not?

In the exegetical literature on the cult-critical passages one may discern two main lines of interpretation. I shall argue that both of them are utterly unsatisfactory. Therefore I will also outline an alternative understanding of these passages.

The first position can be called "the total rejection view." Scholars adhering to this view claim that the "classical" prophets – in the first place,

[1] Leviticus 1–7.

[2] A helpful survey and discussion of attitudes toward sacrifice in some of the major theological traditions in the Hebrew Bible is provided by David Janzen, *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible* (BZAW, 344; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004).

Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah – denounced *all* sacrificial cult as being irreconcilable with true Yahwism. During the late 19th century and the early 20th century, this seems to have been the dominant opinion. Julius Wellhausen and others regarded the prophets as religious innovators, the founders of ethical monotheism, and their message was seen as largely unparalleled in the world of comparative religion, that is: unique.[3] Recent research has, on the contrary, tended to stress the far-reaching similarities between ancient Israelite prophecy and various modes of prophetic activity in other parts of the Ancient Near East.[4] However, the "total rejection view" has been defended also in 21st century scholarship.[5] To some extent rephrasing arguments adduced by earlier exegetes (e.g., Paul Volz), such a prominent researcher on the book of Amos as John Barton maintains that prophets like Amos probably were free-lancers, without any formal link to a temple or any other institution. Instead, they belonged to marginalized groups who were decidedly anti-ritualistic and anti-cultic.[6] Barton concludes: "That the classical prophets of Israel could be seen in this light seems clear enough, and it is not necessarily an anachronism to paint them in the colours of Protestant reformers: there is a clear similarity in some of their attitudes."[7]

The strength of this view is that it may account for the radical formulations of rejection that we come across in some of the "cult-critical" passages, as well as the lack of accompanying demands of cultic reforms.

[3] For a sharp critique of the evolutionism underlying the works of Wellhausen and others, see Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7.

[4] See, e.g., Hans Barstad, "No Prophets? Recent Developments in Biblical Prophetic Research and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy," *JSOT* 57 (1993): 39–60, Ferdinand Deist, "The Prophets: Are We Heading for a Paradigm Switch?" in V. Fritz, K.-F. Pohlmann and H.-C. Schmitt (eds.), *Prophet und Prophetenbuch* (FS Kaiser; BZAW, 185; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1989), 1–18; and Martti Nissinen, "The Historical Dilemma of Biblical Prophetic Studies," in H. M. Barstad and R. G. Kratz (eds.), *Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW, 388; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2009), 103–120.

[5] John Barton, "The Prophets and the Cult," in J. Day (ed.), *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2005) 111–122; Thomas Krüger, "Erwägungen zur prophetischen Kultkritik," in R. Lux and E.-J. Waschke (eds.), *Die unwiderstehliche Wahrheit* (FS Meinhold; Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte, 23; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006), 37–55.

[6] Barton, "The Prophets and the Cult," esp. 216–221. See also idem, *The Theology of the Book of Amos* (Old Testament Theology; Cambridge University Press, 2012), 84–92. As regards anti-ritualism as an anthropological phenomenon, Barton draws heavily on the works of Mary Douglas.

[7] Barton, "The Prophets and the Cult," 117.

However, the notion of anti-ritualistic prophets looks suspiciously anachronistic, despite Barton's refutation of this accusation.[8] This notion cannot find any support in contemporary comparative sources, biblical or extra-biblical, which describe prophetic activity. The picture emerging from extant Ancient Near Eastern texts dealing with prophecy is so far univocal: prophets were, as a rule, linked to temples.[9] Moreover, the total rejection view makes it difficult to explain the fact that allegedly cult-critical and undoubtedly cult-affirmative passages are juxtaposed in the prophetic literature, sometimes within the same book, perhaps most notably in the book of Jeremiah.[10]

The main alternative to this position can be termed the "limited criticism view." It comes in many different versions. What they have in common is the assumption that the prophets did not really reject the cult in its entirety or the sacrifices as such. Rather, they were criticizing the attitude and/or behavior of their addressees, the worshippers.[11] According to these scholars, the message conveyed by phrases such as "I reject your festivals" (Amos 5:21) and "Stop bringing meaningless offerings!" (Isa 1:13) is about priorities, and much in line with traditional wisdom teaching: ethical conduct and sincere faith is more important than extravagant offerings.[12] In my opinion, this line of interpretation is applicable in a couple of

---

[8] Various versions of the Weberian hypothesis that one may speak of a fundamental opposition between prophets and priests are subject to sustained criticism in Ziony Zevit, "The Prophet versus Priest Antagonism Hypothesis: Its History and Origin," in Lester L. Grabbe and Alice Ogden Bellis (eds.), *The Priests in the Prophets* (JSOTSup, 408; London and New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 189–217. See also Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 79–80.

[9] See, e.g., Herbert Huffmon, "A Company of Prophets: Mari, Assyria, Israel," in M. Nissinen (ed.), *Prophecy in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives* (SBLSym, 13; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2000), 47–70.

[10] Compare, e.g., Isa 1:11–15 with Isa 19:19–22; 56:6–7; 60:7, or Jer 6:20 and 7:21 with Jer 17:26; 33:10–11, 18. See further Göran Eidevall, *Sacrificial Rhetoric in the Prophetic Literature of the Hebrew Bible* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2012), 28–29, 173–174, 215–219.

[11] See, e.g., the influential essays by Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg "Die prophetische Kritik am Kult," *ThLZ* 75 (1950): 219–226; and Cuthbert Lattey, "The Prophets and Sacrifice: A Study in Biblical Relativity," *JTS* 42 (1941): 155–165.

[12] Thus Alexander B. Ernst, *Weisheitliche Kultkritik: Zu Theologie und Ethik des Sprüchebuchs und der Prophetie des 8. Jahrhunderts* (Biblisch-theologische Studien, 23; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1994), 97–197; and Otto Kaiser, "Kult und Kultkritik im Alten Testament," in M. Dietrich and I. Kottsieper (eds.), *"Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf": Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient*, (AOAT, 250; Münster:

cases of prophetic cult critique, such as Hos 6:6: "For I desire love and not sacrifice (ולא־זבח), the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings (מעלות)." However, it fails to explain the harsh and uncompromising formulations that we find in other cult-critical passages.

In the following, I will outline a third position which may account for the element of radical rejection, without relying on the problematic notion of programmatically anti-cultic prophets. I propose the term "total but situational rejection" for this view, which is by no means a creation of my own. A number of German exegetes, above all Werner Schmidt and Reinhard Kratz, have argued convincingly that the prophetic cult critique must be understood as an integral part of the message of doom and disaster.[13] The entire cult was rejected, but this was related to the specific situation and did not necessarily imply a renunciation of sacrifice as such. It is my intention to develop this position, in terms of theory and method. On the basis of a new understanding of sacrifice, I will elucidate the phenomenon of rejected sacrifice. Finally, I will present a rhetorical analysis of the two selected texts, in order to demonstrate that the message conveyed by these texts should be understood in terms of "total but situational rejection." In addition, I intend to show that, contrary to a widespread opinion, these passages presuppose a basically positive attitude towards sacrifice.

Sacrifice and reciprocity

In recent literature on sacrifice a new theory has emerged. The key concept is reciprocity.[14] For this very brief summary I am drawing on the work of Daniel Ullucci.[15] According to Ullucci, the practice of bringing

---

Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 401–426. See further the discussion in Eidevall, *Sacrificial Rhetoric*, 14–20.

[13] Werner H. Schmidt, *Zukunftsgewißheit und Gegenwartskritik: Grundzüge prophetischer Verkündigung* (Biblische Studien, 64; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1973); Reinhard G. Kratz, "Die Kultpolemik der Propheten im Rahmen der israelitischen Kultgeschichte," in B. Köhler (ed.), *Religion und Wahrheit: Religionsgeschichtliche Studien* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 101–116.

[14] For an introduction to this concept, with definitions and manifold demonstrations of its applicability within the study of ancient cultures, see C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite and R. Seaford (eds.), *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[15] Daniel C. Ullucci, *The Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 24–30; idem, "Contesting the Meaning of Animal Sacri-

sacrifices to a deity needs to be understood as analogous to the social practice of exchanging gifts, which is attested in virtually all cultures. The main purpose of such gift-giving is not to provide another person with something that s/he really needs. It is rather to establish or to maintain a long-term relationship, which may be asymmetrical (for instance, a patron-client relation). Hence, it is no problem if one party consistently brings less valuable commodities than the other. As long as the exchange continues, the relationship lives on. "The giving and receiving is never really over, because balance is never achieved or sought."[16]

This theory of sacrifice manages to combine two aspects which have been emphasized by earlier theorists, but often as competing alternatives: (1) sacrifices as gifts to the god(s), and (2) sacrifices as means of communion with the god(s).[17] Moreover, it makes clear that ancient worshippers may not have believed that the deity actually *needed* the meat or grain that was offered.[18] The most important thing was the gift-giving in itself. A further advantage of this theory is that it helps us understand the role of rejected sacrifices. True reciprocity can never be enforced. As pointed out by Richard Seaford, in all instances of such exchange "[t]here remains a freedom not to requite."[19] Gifts can be accepted or rejected, and this is part of the social interaction. In other words, far from being an unexpected feature, the possibility of rejection is a corollary of this understanding of sacrificial logic.

The phenomenon of rejected sacrifice

The prophetic declarations that YHWH rejects the sacrifices brought by the people and/or its leaders are, in fact, not unparalleled. In the following, I will offer a survey of other instances of rejected sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in other ancient sources.

---

fice," in Jennifer Wright Knust and Zsuzsanna Várhelyi (eds.), *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 57–74.

[16] Ullucci, *Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice*, 25.

[17] For a summary of the standard theories, see, e.g., Christian Eberhart, *Studien zur Bedeutung der Opfer im Alten Testament: Die Signifikanz von Blut- und Verbrennungsriten im kultischen Rahmen* (WMANT, 94; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002), 6–9, 189–220.

[18] As pointed out by Ullucci, *Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice*, 28.

[19] Richard Seaford, "Introduction," in C. Gill et al. (eds.), *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, 1–12, quote on p. 2.

a. Ugarit: The notion of rejected sacrifice is attested in a passage from the Ba'al epos, where the word *dbḥ* most likely refers to sacrificial feasts:[20]

> For two feasts (*dbḥm*) Baal hates, three, the Cloud-Rider: A feast (*dbḥ*) of shame, a feast of strife, and a feast of the whispering of servant-girls.

This text will be discussed below, because of its similarities with Amos 5:21.

b. Israel / The Hebrew Bible: Several narratives in the HB include episodes featuring rejected or denounced sacrifices. The first of these episodes occurs already in Genesis 4, the well-known story of Cain and Abel. It illustrates the idea that any sacrifice can meet with either divine acceptance (Abel) or divine rejection (Cain). Interestingly, we are not told why YHWH reacted in this way, only that "YHWH looked favorably upon Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard" (Gen 4:4–5). It is worth noting that both the sacrifice and the worshipper are mentioned as objects of divine approval or disapproval. Apparently, rejected sacrifice is here interpreted as a renunciation of the reciprocal relationship with the deity.

In other cases, a reason for the rejection is stated. Sometimes, the fault lies in the ritual procedure (Lev 10:1–2). More often, other types of transgression or disobedience are involved. Thus, Moses prayed to YHWH, concerning Korah and his followers, who had made a rebellion: "Pay no attention to their offering" (Num 16:15). The next day, those from the Korah camp who had brought incense offerings were killed by divine fire (Num 16:16, 35). According to Samuel, in another well-known narrative, King Saul had failed to obey YHWH's orders concerning the ban (1 Sam 15:9). Hence, the sacrifices offered by Saul and the people were of no avail, since these animals should not have been spared in the first place (1 Sam 15:21). As a consequence, Saul *himself* is rejected by YHWH (vv. 22–23).

---

[20] KTU/CAT 1.4.III: 17–21. English translation quoted from Mark S. Smith, and Wayne Pitard, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, vol. 2 (VTSup, 114; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 463. These words are uttered by Ba'al in the assembly of the gods, at an occasion when he appears to be frustrated, despite his victory over Yammu, the Sea. His kingship has not yet been established, and his house has not yet been built. On top of it all, he has been insulted during a banquet. For a more detailed discussion of the text, see Smith and Pitard, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, 455–466.

c. Greece: As shown by Fred Naiden, "the same infrequent but important phenomenon," namely rejected sacrifice, occurs in both Israelite and Greek religion and literature.[21] He lists 29 cases, drawn from various classical Greek sources.[22] The rejected worshipper was often a ruler, but sometimes a whole group was affected. The declaration that the offering had not been accepted could be conveyed by means of "gests of aversion" or "words of refusal."[23] In the latter case, the words were often spoken by an oracle at a sanctuary (Delphi, for instance). The reason for rejection, if stated, is often some kind of sacrilege, or a violation of the rules of hospitality.[24] Naiden suggests that reports of allegedly rejected sacrifices may have served as "an instrument of propaganda," directed against political enemies.[25]

Although it appears to represent a late (Hellenistic?) addition, the following passage from (many editions of) Homer's *Iliad* is worth citing:[26]

> [The Trojans] … offered to the immortals perfect hecatombs. And from the plains the wind bore the savor up into heaven – a sweet savor, but the blessed gods partook not of it, nor were they minded to; for utterly hated by them was sacred Ilios, and Priam, and the people of Priam.

With regard to the discussion of the cult-critical passages in the prophetic books in the HB, the following points are especially noteworthy in

---

[21] Fred S. Naiden, "Rejected Sacrifice in Greek and Hebrew Religion," *JANER* 6 (2006): 189–223, quote on p. 189. Mention should also be made of a recent Swedish study on rejected sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible and in ancient Greek sources: Sten Hidal, "When and Why is a Sacrifice Rejected? A Comparison between Homer and the Old Testament," in Pär Sandin and Marianne Wifstrand Scheibe (eds.), *Dais philēsistephanos: Studies in Honour of Professor Staffan Fogelmark* (Uppsala: Dahlia, 2004), 11–18. However, Hidal's and Naiden's conclusions differ considerably. This may to some extent be due to the fact that Hidal focuses on Homer's works, where rejected sacrifice is a marginal phenomenon.

[22] Naiden, "Rejected Sacrifice," 218–220.

[23] Naiden, "Rejected Sacrifice," 196. To cite just a few of the examples adduced by Naiden: "Zeus 'paid no heed' to the sacrifice of a ram by Odysseus, and Nero 'did not obtain a prophecy' when he went to Delphi."

[24] Naiden, "Rejected Sacrifice," 204–211.

[25] Naiden, "Rejected Sacrifice," 194.

[26] *Iliad* 8.548–52. English translation by A. T. Murray. Quoted from *Homer, Iliad Books 1–12* (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). For a detailed discussion of the text-critical problem, see G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary,* Volume II: *Books 5–8* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 340. The lines 548 + 550–552 are missing in the manuscripts, but they appear as a purportedly Homeric quotation in (manuscripts of) one of Plato's dialogues, *Alcibiades*. The view that all the gods were against Troy is clearly at odds with other passages in the *Iliad*.

this pseudo-Homeric quotation: (1) The sacrificial offerings of an entire nation (the Trojans) are rejected, but with a certain emphasis on the political ruler (Priamos); (2) There is no reason to assume that the gods in question were thought to be against *all* sacrifices; (3) The reason for rejection is linked to a major disturbance in the relationship between a certain people (the Trojans) and their gods: "utterly hated by them was … the people of Priam."

A rhetorical analysis of Amos 5:21–24

> 21 I hate, I reject your festivals,
> and I do not delight in your assemblies.
> 22 Even if you bring burnt offerings (עלות) to me
> – your grain offerings (ומנחתיכם) I will not accept.
> I will not even look at the communion sacrifices (שלם) of your fatlings.
> 23 Take away from me the noise of your songs!
> I do not want to hear the music of your harps.
> 24 But let justice roll on like waters,
> righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

The first thing to notice in this text is that the introductory words of rejection, "I hate (שנאתי, *śānē'tî*), I reject your festivals," are reminiscent of the passage from the Ugaritic Ba'al cycle which was cited above: "For two feasts Baal hates (*šn'a*), three, the Cloud-Rider."[27] It is thus likely that a conventional, and quite ancient, formula underlies Amos 5:21. To this we may add the observation that v. 22 contains the phrase לא ארצה, "I do not accept." Since רצה appears to have been used as a technical term for divine approval of sacrifices, Amos 5:21–22 looks like the very opposite of a priestly declaration that the offerings have been accepted by the deity.[28] On a formal level, then, this announcement of rejection *presupposes the possibility of acceptance*. The similarity with the Ugaritic text, and the fact that reports of rejected sacrifice occur in several biblical narratives, may lead to a further conclusion: This text was formulated within a cultural context where worshippers were aware that sacrificial offerings could be either accepted or rejected.

---

[27] KTU/CAT 1.4.III: 17–18. See note 20 above.

[28] With Jörg Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos* (ATD, 24/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 78–79.

Secondly, this declaration of divine dislike and rejection concerns *the cult in its entirety*. Three different types of sacrifice are mentioned in v. 22: the burnt offering (עלה), the grain offering (מנחה),[29] and the communion sacrifice (שלם).[30] Since the opening exclamation denounces the religious festivals *in toto* (v. 21), and since even the music that accompanied the celebrations is picked out for detailed criticism (v. 23), it is safe to assume that Amos 5:21–24 makes a statement concerning *every* aspect of the contemporary temple cult.[31] One looks in vain for formulations that could indicate some kind of limitation. Clearly, this is a case of *total and radical rejection*. No reform of the cult is being proposed. The message is not: There are things that are more important than sacrifice. It is rather: The entire sacrificial cult is doomed, and therefore inefficacious and meaningless.

Thirdly, it is important to study the text's use of pronouns. There is a constant play between the 1st person singular, representing the deity (YHWH, speaking through his mouthpiece, the prophet), and the 2nd person plural (vv. 21–22), alternatively the 2nd person singular (v. 23), representing the addressees (the people of Israel, the Northern Kingdom). Clearly, this message needs to be understood as *relational*. YHWH does not declare that he dislikes *all* sacrifices, regardless of where or by whom they are brought. The formulations used are always specific, pertaining to the reciprocal relationship between the nation of Israel and its patron deity: "*I* hate, *I* reject *your* festivals … *your* assemblies … *your* grain offerings … *your* songs … ." In other words, this case of rejection appears to be total, but *situational*.

Further confirmation for the proposed reading comes from the observation that music is condemned, as well. Notably, the formulations are as

---

[29] According to H. W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 2: Joel und Amos* (4th edn; BKAT, XIV/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004 [1969]), 307, מנחה (*minḥâ*) should here be taken in a generic sense, as a "Sammelbegriff für alle Opferdarbringungen." I find this unlikely. Together with the other terms in v. 22, which cannot be generic, מנחה completes a triad that covers all the main types of sacrifice in ancient Israel and Judah.

[30] The singular form of שלם (*šelem*) is rare. This type of sacrifice, as a rule accompanied by a festive meal, is more commonly designated זבח שלמים (*zĕbaḥ šĕlāmîm*). Some exegetes advocate an emendation, reading a plural form. However, this is hardly necessary. See Shalom M. Paul, *Amos* (Hermeneia; Philadephia: Fortress, 1991), 191.

[31] As noted by Paul, *Amos*, 192, "this total disavowal of the cult is expressed anthropomorphically by the Lord's shutting off, so to speak, several of his own senses." Three divine senses are mentioned (and said to be "shut off"): smell (v. 21), sight (v. 22), and hearing (v. 23).

harsh as those pertaining to sacrifice. The declaration "I will not look at the communion sacrifices of your fatlings" in v. 22 is echoed by "I do not want to hear the music of your harps" in v. 23. The prophetic anathema seems to cover all kinds of music, since it mentions both vocal and instrumental performance. To the best of my knowledge, no serious interpreter of Amos 5:23 has ever suggested that the prophet here announces that the singing of hymns is against God's will. Nevertheless, as we have seen, some scholars claim that Amos 5:21–22 should be read as a rejection of *all* sacrificial cult. In my opinion, such an interpretation is flawed by severe inconsistency. For us modern Westerners, it might of course be easier to imagine a deity disliking animal sacrifice than accepting the notion of divine antipathy against beautiful songs sung by sopranos or played on harps. But we must try to reconstruct the ideas shared by the author and the first readers of this ancient text. Focusing on the rhetorical function of the text may aid us in this.

The rhetorical strategy can be described in terms of shock and reversal of expectations (cf. the preceding passage, 5:18–20, dealing with the day of YHWH). In order for this strategy to work, it is essential that both speaker/author and addressees agree on certain premises: (1) The reciprocal relationship with YHWH is maintained through the temple cult. (2) Proper worship involves the bringing of sacrifices (at times accompanied by music).

It is against this backdrop that the prophet announces: YHWH rejects *your* sacrifices, *your* cult. The relationship between the deity and the people is endangered. YHWH reacts very much like a human being who wants to cancel a relation: I don't want your presents, I don't want to see you, I can't stand listening to your voice!

But why would YHWH react like this? According to the Ugaritic text cited above, Ba'al disliked feasts characterized by quarrel and shameful behavior. In Amos 5:21–24, however, the reason for rejection is not clearly stated. Arguably, though, it can be inferred from the well-known conclusion of the oracle, v. 24: "let justice roll on like waters." Due to lack of justice (which is a prominent theme in other passages in the book of Amos: 2:6–7; 5:10–12; 8:4–6), the nation is doomed. As a consequence, all forms of cult are denounced.

If Amos 5:21–24 can be dated to the 8th century, before the downfall of the Northern Kingdom, as suggested by some scholars, the declaration

that YHWH rejects the people's sacrifices serves to underline the severity of the situation.[32] Divine punishment, taking the form of an imminent disaster, is inescapable. But the offering of sacrifices is not seen as one of the sins that provoked the divine anger! Alternatively, if a later date is preferred, after the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE, we may understand this text as a piece of pro-Judean propaganda, which explains why YHWH rejected the Northern Kingdom (which made it possible for Judah to become the new Israel).[33] In neither case are sacrifices as such denounced by this passage.

A rhetorical analysis of Isa 1:11–15

11 What are they to me, the multitude of your sacrifices (זבחיכם)?
says YHWH.
I am sated with burnt offerings (עלות) of rams and the fat of fattened cattle,
I do not desire blood of bulls or lambs or goats.
12 When you come to see my face
– who required this of you, this trampling of my courts?
13 Stop bringing meaningless offerings (מנחת־שוא), and incense (קטרת)
– this is an abomination to me!
New moon and Sabbath, calling a convocation
– I cannot stand an assembly with evil!
14 My soul hates your new moons and your festivals.
They have become a burden to me, I am weary of carrying it.
15 When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you,
even if you multiply prayers, I will not listen.
Your hands are full of blood.

There are striking affinities between Isa 1:11–15 (which can be seen as the core of a larger unit, comprising vv. 10–17) and Amos 5:21–24. Similarities are found on several levels: form, content, and vocabulary.[34] Interestingly, also the text from Isaiah contains an expression which resembles

[32] Such a dating is advocated by several modern commentators. See, e.g., Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos*, 75, and Wolff, *Joel und Amos*, 306.
[33] For an interpretation of Amos 5:21–24 along these lines, see Kratz, "Die Kultpolemik der Propheten," 105–106, 111–12.
[34] It is difficult to determine whether this is a case of direct literary dependence. Possibly, Amos 5:21–24 served as a source of inspiration for the author of Isa 1:11–15. Alternatively, both texts draw on a common source or tradition. For further details concerning the scholarly discussion, see Eidevall, *Sacrificial Rhetoric*, 79.

the passage from the Ba'al cycle which was discussed above: "My soul hates … your festivals" (1:14).[35]

The radical character of the prophecy recorded in Isa 1:11–15 can hardly be denied. All the main types of sacrifice are mentioned, only to be rejected: sacrifices of communion and burnt offerings (v. 11), as well as incense offerings (v. 13). That the negative verdict encompasses the Jerusalemite temple cult in its entirety is underlined by the circumstance that even prayer is included in this prophetic attack on contemporary worship (v. 15).[36] The rejection can thus be described as *total*.

Right from the start, with the emphatic *lî* ("to *me*") of the initial clause, and throughout the entire oracle, the language used is *relational*: "*your* sacrifices … who required this of *you* … an abomination to *me* … *my* soul hates *your* new moons and *your* festivals." In my opinion, the image of YHWH as a partner who wants to terminate a relationship comes even more to the fore here than in the Amos passage discussed above.

The grotesquely anthropomorphic utterance in v. 11, which implies that YHWH has been eating too much meat and drinking too much blood, should arguably be taken metaphorically as well as ironically. In this way, the prophet/author stresses the severity of the relational crisis between YHWH and the addressees. Thus, just like someone who wants to break up from a long-standing relationship, say a marriage or a love affair, the deity declares that he has had enough (שׂבעתי), and that all desire is gone (לא חפצתי). And the text continues in the same vein: YHWH can no longer stand the presence of the former partner, that is, the community of Judean worshippers (v. 12). At this stage, he detests everything that comes *from them*. Hence, it has become meaningless to present valuable offerings to YHWH, or to honor the deity with incense (v. 13). The whole cult has turned pointless. The joyous temple festivals in Jerusalem, we are told, have become a burden for the deity (v. 14). Indeed, YHWH can no

[35] The affinity to the Ugaritic passage was observed already by Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja, 1*. Teilband: *Jesaja 1–12* (BKAT, X/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1972), 44.

[36] The Septuagint version of v. 13 adds yet another aspect of cultic worship, since it reads "fasting" (νηστείαν) in place of MT:s "evil" (און). For a detailed discussion of this text-critical issue, see Bohdan Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension of Cult in the Book of Isaiah* (BZAW, 418; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 95–97, or Hugh Williamson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 1–27.* Vol. 1: *Commentary on Isaiah 1–5* (ICC; London and New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 78.

longer endure the sight of the addressees, nor the sound of their voices (v. 15).[37]

Similarly to what we found in the Amos passage, the reason for the deity's unwillingness to continue the reciprocal relationship is stated at the very end: "your hands are full of blood" (v. 15). Apparently, violent crimes and other forms of "evil" (v. 13b) lie behind the rejection. Clearly, divine dislike for sacrifices is not presented as a cause of the crisis. It is rather seen as a consequence of the misdeeds of the people and their leaders.

Summing up the observations made thus far, one may conclude that Isa 1:11–15 is a case of *total but relational and situational rejection* of the pre-exilic sacrificial cult in Jerusalem. This interpretation can find further support in the fact that not only sacrifices are targeted – also the prayers of the people are described as inefficacious (v. 15). For some biblical scholars, this has posed a problem. They could easily imagine a prophetic opposition against sacrifices. But why would YHWH, or a prophet speaking in the name of YHWH, have something against prayer? I agree with those scholars who draw the conclusion that Isa 1:11–15 cannot be read as an absolute rejection of *all* sacrificial cult whatsoever, because such a reading would imply a similar condemnation of all prayer.[38] Still, the rhetorical point of rejecting both sacrifices and prayers still needs to be clarified. Some exegetes argue that the message conveyed is that ethics is more important than prayer and sacrifice.[39] However, such an interpretation would not seem to do justice to the radical formulations in this text.

If narratives featuring the motif of rejected sacrifice are taken into consideration, another interpretation becomes possible. Discussing such cases in both Greek and Hebrew literature, Naiden emphasizes that when a god rejects someone's sacrifice, this always means that the accompanying prayer, or request, is denied, and *vice versa*:

[37] Cf. Williamson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 97.
[38] Thus, e.g., Wildberger, *Jesaja*, 38, 45.
[39] For an interpretation along these lines, see, e.g., Williamson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 88.

> The god rejects everything and everyone – sacrifice, request, any prayer, and, most important, the worshipper. The rejected sacrifice forms part of a whole, a juggernaut.[40]

Against this background, I agree with Werner Schmidt that the fact that prayer is mentioned in parallel to sacrificial offering supports the conclusion that this is an announcement of total, but situational rejection of the cult and, most importantly, of the worshippers.[41] Because the doom has already been decreed, it is, according to this oracle, too late for offerings or prayers, too late for any attempt to propitiate YHWH. All efforts to reach the deity have been blocked (cf. similarly Jer 14:11–12).

As far as I can see, the rhetorical strategy used in Isa 1:11–15 presupposes that the prophet/writer and the first addressees shared the idea that sacrifice was a legitimate, and vitally important, means of worship. Communion and communication with the deity was probably seen as impossible without recourse to offerings and/or prayers. Against this backdrop, the message becomes shockingly effective.

Arguably, the reading outlined here makes sense regardless of precise dating.[42] If the passage was composed before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 587 BCE, it can be regarded as a prediction of that disaster. Alternatively, it provides a theological explanation for the disaster, constructed in retrospect. The text as we have it is, at any rate, most probably the result of an edition that took place after 587 BCE. Read from such a perspective, this passage addresses questions that must have been asked after the destruction of the temple: How could YHWH let this happen? Were all sacrifices and prayers really in vain? Isa 1:11–15 conveys the potentially comforting message that the disaster was not due to YHWH's incapability to protect his own temple or his own people. The

[40] Naiden, "Rejected Sacrifice," 195. According to Hidal, "When and Why is a Sacrifice Rejected?," 16–17, there is an important difference between Israelite and Greek religion in this respect. While the God of Israel encourages prayer (and often rejects sacrifice), the gods in Homer "do not demand prayers" (16) and therefore often reject such verbal requests. On the other hand, the Greek deities "never seem to get enough of sacrifices" (17). In my opinion, Hidal overstates the differences. Most importantly, as pointed out by Naiden, sacrifice and prayer belonged together in ancient religion, as two parts of the same ritual event. Neither in the Hebrew Bible nor in Homer do we find declarations to the effect that a deity accepts someone's prayer but rejects his/her sacrifice, or *vice versa*.

[41] See Schmidt, *Zukunftsgewißheit*, 77–78.

[42] For a discussion of various scholarly positions on the dating of Isa 1:11–15, and the larger editorial unit it belongs to (1:10–17), ranging from the 8th century BCE to the Persian period, see Eidevall, *Sacrificial Rhetoric*, 85–88.

catastrophe was rather a result of YHWH's rejection of the late pre-exilic cult, and this divine decree was caused by the iniquity of the people and their leaders in that specific historical situation.

Conclusions

In this paper I have analyzed two passages that belong to the so-called cult-critical passages in the prophetic literature: Amos 5:21–24 and Isa 1:11–15. These texts attest to a phenomenon that was not restricted to ancient Israel and Judah: rejected sacrifice. Contrary to a widespread opinion, these texts do not discard sacrifice as an unworthy ingredient in proper worship of the god of Israel. In the analysis above, it was underlined that the rhetorical strategy of these passages presupposes a basically positive attitude toward sacrificial cult. It was also argued that sacrifices need to be understood in terms of exchange of gifts within a reciprocal relationship.

Against such a background, it is possible to account for the juxtaposition of cult-critical and cult-affirming utterances in the prophetic books in the Hebrew Bible. Some prophetic messages, such as Amos 5:21–24 and Isa 1:11–15 (see also Jer 6:20; 7:21), proclaim that YHWH in certain situations, and for certain reasons, refuses to accept the offerings brought by Israelite or Judean worshippers. Because the deity has rejected the community, their gifts are rejected, as well. As long as the reciprocal relationship remains broken, YHWH will not accept anything coming from them. But once the relationship changes to the better, sacrificial gifts would most certainly be welcome (see, e.g., Isa 56:6–7; 60:7; Jer 17:24–26; 33:11, 18). Such is, I suggest, the logic behind biblical and other ancient texts announcing divine rejection of sacrifices.