The Guilt Offering (Reparation Offering) and the Sin Offering (Purification Offering)
(אָשָׁם *āšām* and חַטָּאת *ḥaṭṭā't*)

Earlier notes revised. 2018.

Averbeck says (in NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 558):

> There have been numerous proposals regarding the meaning and significance of the ‹āšām› offering, especially the difference between it and the sin offering.

1. אָשָׁם *āšām*

Renderings

Majority of English versions: **guilt offering** / KJV trespass offering / REB reparation-offering / GNB repayment offering. GECL Wiedergutmachungsopfer [= reparation sacrifice].

Loci classici

Lev 5:14-26; 7:1-10.

Dictionaries

HALOT:

> —1. **guilt** Gn 2610 Jr 515 Ps 6822 Pr 149 (:: רָצוֹן, → Gemser): —2. **restitution** Nu 57f; —3. **guilt-offering** Lv 56-25 610 71f.5.7.37 1412-28 1921f Nu 612 189 2K 1217 Ezk 4039 4213 4429 4620 cj. Ezr 1019 Sir 731 (לחם אש[מ]ים ?); —4. **gift of atonement, compensation** 1S 63f.8.17 Is 5310 ...

There is no discussion. The entry in Gesenius / Donner is similar.

TWOT lists the glosses "guiltiness / offering for sin / sin / trespass ", and – regarding the offering – speaks of "trespass offering", with only brief comments.

NIDOTTE (# 871) has a long article written by Averbeck. He quotes (p. 558) Milgrom:

> The ‹āšām› expiates for sancta *desecration*, the ‹ḥattāt› for sancta *contamination*.

He continues (p. 558):

> His approach has been well received in general among scholars if not always in detail. There are still some problems.

He explains the basic distinction from Lev 10:10 as follows (p. 559):

> ... *consecration* changes the status of someone or something by shifting them from the realm of the common to the realm of the holy [*or:* sacred, PS]. ... *purification* changes their *condition* from unclean to clean [*or:* impure / pure, PS].

Further:

> Milgrom is right with regard to the overall purpose of the guilt offering. The evidence suggest that its primary purpose was to make atonement for "desecration" of "sancta", that is, the mishandling of holy things ...[1]

THAT does not rule out "reparation / compensation", but defines the primary meaning more broadly as (vol. I, col. 254):

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[1] About the defiled Nazirite (Num 6:9-12), he says (562f.): "The sin offering atonement purified the sanctuary[?] from the contamination caused by the defilement of the Nazirites hair, ... the guilt offering was part of the rededication ceremony and made atonement for the desecration of his previous hair and the earlier vow ...".

die aus einem Schuldiggewordensein resultierende Verpflichtung, die Schuldpflicht, Schuldverpflichtung, das Schuldverpflichtetsein oder die Haftpflicht [≈ obligation resulting from having become guilty; liability].

The Semantic Dictionary of BH (sdbh.org) defines:

= sacrifice brought to compensate for what the deity should have received, but what was not given – guilt offering; reparation offering

The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Database (sahd.div.ed.ac.uk) does not yet have this entry.

Commentaries

Jemphrey[2] (p. 17) says that "recent commentators unanimously ... prefer 'reparation offering'". In his summary table, he characterizes this offering as "reparation for the desecration of Yahweh's property or name".

Translation

Tentative conclusion: I see at least two possibilities:
- One keeps an equivalent of the traditional term "guilt offering". This makes translating simpler. The word would have to be accompanied by a glossary entry.
- Jemphrey argues for a functional approach and, for his situation, writes (p. 22):

To translate ‹āšām›, I suggest 'reparation' + *sáraga*. The Supyire do make sacrifices to repair the land when it is spoilt by, for instance, human blood being spilt on it. This may open the way for an understanding of ‹āšām› as repairing the sanctity of God's property or name, but the term would have to be checked to ensure that the idea of repairing the land is not inferred. If that proved to be the case, then a term like 'reparation of God's property' + *sáraga* might have to be considered.

2. חַטָּאת *ḥaṭṭā't*

Renderings

Majority of English versions: **sin offering** / REB purification-offering / GNB uses "sin offering" (e.g. Lev 4:14), but sometimes avoids such a term (e.g. 4:3 "sacrifice it for his sin"; 5:9 "an offering to take away sin") / GECL: Sühneopfer [= atonement sacrifice].

Locus classicus

Lev 4:1-5:13.

Dictionaries

HALOT:

—1. **sin** (155 ×): ... —2. **expiation, sin-offering** (135 ×) ...

Strangely, Gesenius / Donner (s.v. חַטָּאָה) hardly list any occurrences from Lev 4 & 5. Glosses are:

1. Sünde, Schuld; 2. ...; 3. Vergehen; 4. Sündenstrafe; 5. Sündenritus, Sündopfer; 6. Reinigung v. Sünden. [≈ sin, guilt; offence/trespassing; punishment; sin offering (rite); purification from sins].

TWOT speaks of "sin offering" as "the means of removing the guilt and penalty of sin before the Lord through the sacrificial system".

The article in NIDOTTE (# 2633) is again written by Averbeck. He keeps the gloss "sin offering" in the heading. He says (vol. 2, p. 94):

According to Lev 4-5, by means of the sin offering the worshipers could receive forgiveness for their sin and, at the same time, deal with the degree to which their sin might have contaminated the tabernacle. In some instances, however, the issue had only to do with physical impurities and the associated contamination of the

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[2] Michael Jemphrey: Translating the Levitical Sacrifices. In: Journal of Translation, 2007-1. – Jemphrey was concerned with the translation of sacrifice terms into the Supyire language of Mali. With this background he has processed and summarized the current discussion.

tabernacle. Thus, <u>in those cases, the result was stated to be cleansing rather than forgiveness</u> [with references]. ...

(p. 95:) ..., in our age sin offering tends to be associated with moral sin. In the OT moral sin was included, but the sin offering could also be brought for physical impurities that had nothing to do with moral failure. ... Therefore, <u>many have called it a purification offering rather than a sin offering</u>. This is good if we mean that it purified the tabernacle for whatever sin or impurity might have defiled it. But <u>it should not be taken to mean that the sin offering only applied to issues of physical (amoral) uncleanness</u>. According to Lev 4:2 it applied to "what is forbidden in *any* of the LORD's commands."

THAT (vol. I) speaks about the basic meaning "(ein Ziel) verfehlen" [= to miss (a target) / fail] and says that 2/5 of the occurrences of the noun stand for "Sündopfer" [= sin offering] (543); it underlines the legal aspect and that the sinner had to confess (544); it mentions that the missing / failing affects a relationship (545), and also the Lord (548). But it does not discuss ‹ḥaṭṭā't› as an *offering term*.

The Semantic Dictionary of BH (sdbh.org) defines:

action whereby a human being performs the sacrificial ritual that is intended <u>to remove the state of guilt</u> from oneself or someone else – <u>sin-offering</u>

The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Database (sahd.div.ed.ac.uk) does not yet have this entry.

Commentaries

Jemphrey (p. 16) says that Milgrom, Wenham and Hartley all prefer the rendering <u>'purification offering'</u>. In his summary table, he characterizes this offering as "purification of the sanctuary and the people".

Translation

Tentative conclusion: The traditional expression "sin offering" still has validity. At the same time, the aspect of purification also deserves consideration. Probably, whichever term is chosen, the aspect that is not expressed by it needs to be explained in the glossary. Whether two different renderings for this key term should be used needs careful checking.

Jemphrey (p. 22):

To translate ‹ḥaṭṭā't›, I suggest <u>'cleansing'</u> + *sáraga.* The concept of purification from the pollution caused by sin is unknown to the Supyire. As another option it may be possible to render ‹ḥaṭṭā't› as <u>'cleansing-before-God-sacrifice' or 'cleanse-from-defilement-sacrifice'</u>, but these might prove unwieldy and may not be necessary. In the context of Leviticus, all the sacrifices are made to God, and readers may be able to fit this sacrifice into the pattern, especially if the background information is supplied in another fashion, such as in a heading or footnote.

3. New Testament

- Isa 53 speaks of the Servant as of both a „lamb" and a <u>"guilt offering"</u>. (NIDOTTE I 564f.)
- On the two passages Rom 8:3 (NIV), where God sent his Son "in the likeness of sinful man to be a <u>sin offering</u> (FN: *Or:* for sin)" and 2Co 5:21 (NIV) "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us (FN: *Or:* to be a sin offering for us), Averbeck, at least on 2Co, prefers "sin offering", because "One did not offer something sinful" in the Old Testament. (NIDOTTE II 101).
- "Although there is some overlap with the guilt offering, it is the sin offering rationale that is at the foundation of atonement, redemption, forgiveness, and purification terminology and concepts in the NT. ... It will be recalled that the offering with which atonement was most associated was the sin offering." *(loc. cit.)*