



The "Grammar" of Sacrifice: A Generativist Study of the Israelite Sacrificial System in the Priestly Writings with The "Grammar" of *S

Naphtali S. Meshel

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The notion that rituals, like natural languages, are governed by implicit, rigorous rules led scholars in the last century, harking back to the early Indian grammarian Patanjali, to speak of a "grammar", or "syntax", of ritual, particularly sacrificial ritual. Despite insightful examples of ritual complexes that follow hierarchical rules akin to syntactic structures in natural languages, and ambitious attempts to imagine a Universal Grammar of sacrificial ritual, no single, comprehensive "grammar" of any ritual system has yet been composed.

This book offers the first such "grammar." Centering on *S--the idealized sacrificial system represented in the Priestly laws in the Pentateuch--it demonstrates that a ritual system is describable in terms of a set of concise, unconsciously internalized, generative rules, analogous to the grammar of a natural language. Despite far-reaching diachronic developments, reflected in Second Temple and rabbinic literature, the ancient Israelite sacrificial system retained a highly unchangeable "grammar," which is abstracted and analysed in a formulaic manner.

The limits of the analogy to linguistics are stressed: rather than categories borrowed from linguistics, such as syntax and morphology, the operative categories of *S are abstracted inductively from the ritual texts: *zoemics*--the study of the classes of animals used in ritual sacrifice; *jugation*--the rules governing the joining of animal and non-animal materials; *hierarchics*--the tiered structuring of sacrificial sequences; and *praxemics*--the analysis of the physical activity comprising sacrificial procedures. Finally, the problem of *meaning* in non-linguistic ritual systems is addressed.

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