

WOMAN BOUND/UNBOUND: SACRIFICIAL MOTIFS IN DAVID FRISCHMANN'S "SOTAH"

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Playing with notions of the Jewish past as he creates a Hebrew literature for the future, David Frischmann uses a Jewish folk framework to relay a tale of violence and transgression in his short story "Sotah." In "Sotah," which appeared in *Bamidbar: ma'asiyyot bibliyyot, sippurim ve'aggadot* (1923), Frischmann appropriates the Biblical *sotah* ritual, a trial by ordeal outlined in Numbers 5:11-31, as a dramatic means of incorporating the bloody economy of sacrifice into his narrative. Actualizing and embodying the law of the Biblical text, Frischmann's story constitutes a striking example of a Hebrew Revival aesthetic which utilizes Biblical linguistic style and subject matter while sharply commenting on contemporary Jewish affairs.

The paper explores the role of sacrificial motifs in this cautionary tale which pits Shifrah, a wrongfully accused woman, against the newly minted legalistic mechanism that is supposed to bring her to justice. Tapping into the already-present imagery of altar and Tabernacle, Frischmann places his female protagonist in the hands of a ruthless priest who is aware of the importance of crystallizing the people's faith. I contend that Frischmann deliberately sets up Shifrah as a sacrificial object by symbolically connecting her body with components of ritual sacrifice such as fire and blood. Yet after "binding" Shifrah into the unstoppable legal proceedings of the *sotah*, and allowing her to be "unbound" by the priest before the gathered collective, Frischmann throws a wrench into his narrative by having Shifrah die before the *sotah* ritual is completed.

Thus, the paper will examine how the story's problematic ending impacts, and possibly subverts, its presentation of sacrifice. Specifically, I will ask whether Shifrah's death should be considered a sacrifice, or whether her collapse before drinking the bitter waters in effect serves to "sacrifice the sacrifice" that was awaiting her. In this way, I will bring Shifrah into dialogue with Isaac and the paradigm of the *akedah*. The discussion will also be informed by the Hegelian model of sacrifice and the notion of sacrifice as a movement forward that achieves a certain pragmatic result. My goal is to situate Frischmann's mobilization and critique of the Bible within a cultural movement, the Hebrew Revival, that itself aimed to "move forward" and achieve an aesthetic agenda. Ultimately, I will suggest what this story of potentially aborted sacrifice means at the moment of cultural revival and renewal.