

בָּקָר *bāqār**

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I

1. *Etymology and Semitic Dialects.* The etymology of *baqar* cannot be determined precisely. It is unlikely that it is a derivative of *bqr* I piel, “to investigate, pay heed to.” *baqar* is found mainly in West Semitic dialects.

a. In a Mari letter, it is reported: “The soldiers and the cattle (*buqāru*) are in good condition,” i.e., the soldiers and their supply of meat are in good order. No other examples from Mari are known.

b. There is no example of *buqāru* in Assyrian; but cf. *b/pug/qurru*. *bugurra* appears in *KAR*, 154, verso 11 as a sacrifice, and in *SV AT*, 13, 34 verso 1 with the determinative UZU as sacrificial meat of an ox or a sheep.⁶ There is probably no relationship between *baqar* and Assyr. *bakkaru*, “young camel,” “young ass,” cf. Heb. *bekher*. The Akkadian word that corresponds to Heb. *baqar* is *lītu(m)* II, later *littu* I, “cow.”

c. In Northwest Semitic dialects, *bqr* does not appear in Ugaritic, Moabite, or Amurritic. Phoen. *bqr* occurs in the Kilamuwa Inscription (825 B.C.) along with sheep—flock of sheep, cattle (*ʿlp*)—herd of cattle (*bqr*), linen—byssus, as wealth and possessions. The reading of the example of Inscription II from Larnax Lapethos is disputed: some read *smdt bqr*, “a yoke of oxen,” while others read, *[k]tbt wsmrt bqr*, “[the tablet of bronze] which I ... wrote and fastened on the wall.” Middle Hebrew has the words *bāqār*, “cattle,” *baqrūt*, “cattle-shed, stable,” and *baqqār*, “cowboy.”

d. *bqr* and its derivatives are found in Western and Eastern Aramaic, and *baqara*, “herdsman,” “herd of cattle,” and *baqra*, “herd,” “paddock,” occur in Mandaean.

e. In Southwest Semitic dialects, we may compare Arab. *baqar*, pl. *buqūr*, *abāqir*, “ox,” “cow,” *ubqūr*, “cow,” “ox,” and perhaps *baqqār*, “breeder of oxen.” In the Old South Arab. Inscriptions, *bqr* appears often among the spoils: children, cattle (*bʿr*) (camels, oxen [*bqrm*], asses, small livestock).

2. *Occurrences in the OT.* *baqar* occurs in the OT 183 times: Gen., 17 times; Ex., 9; Lev., 12; Nu., 50; Dt., 10; Jgs., 1; 1–2 S., 19; 1–2 K., 14; Isa., 5; Jer., 4; Ezk., 6; Hos., Joel, Am., Jonah, Hab., and Pss., 1 each; Job, 4; Eccl. and Neh., 1 each; and 1–2 Ch., 24. 61 examples come from the Priestly source, and 12 go back to J. The examples in Ezk. are related to P, while those in Am., Job, and Eccl. come from a Wisdom background. Only 8 certain examples are found in the Prophets.

3. *Words for "Cattle."* The following Hebrew words have essentially the same meaning as *baqar* (183 times): *behemah*, 188 times; *miqneh*, 76; *'eghel*, 35; *'eghlah*, 12; *par*, 131; and *shor*, 79. *baqar* is defined more precisely in the OT by *zakhar*, "male," 4 times, and once each by *tobh*, "good," and *neqebhah*, "female."

4. *Expressions Using baqar.* a. *tso'n ubhaqar*, "sheep and oxen (or cattle)," or "flocks and herds," appears as a stereotyped expression in the OT 32 times in the absolute, and 12 times in construct expressions or divided only by numerals or related terms. In lists of men and animals, groups of animals, or even groups of sacrifices, this expression occurs in the singular in contrast to the plural forms around it, and in construct forms (cf. 1 S. 15:9; Jer. 31:12; 2 Ch. 32:29; 1 S. 15:21; 30:20) it is treated as a syntactical unit. In the list in Ex. 10:9, which contains pairs of opposites, *tso'n*, "flocks," is set in contrast to *baqar*, "herds." Thus, the first redactor of P unites *kebhes*, "lamb," and *'ez*, "goat," under *tso'n* (Lev. 1:10), and makes *tso'n* a separate species from *baqar*. The expression *tso'n ubhaqar* is found 13 times in Genesis, while the same phrase in reversed order, *baqar vetso'n*, "cattle (or oxen) and sheep" or "herds and flocks" (which appears a total of 25 times in the OT), is found only 8 times in P, but it occurs 7 times in Deuteronomy, which is worthy of note. This phrase in reversed order appears above all in regulations concerning sacrifice (cf. also the 4 examples in Ch.), because the most valuable material is always mentioned first in lists of sacrifices.

b. The sequence *par[im] ben baqar*, "young bull," *'ayil*, "ram," *kebhes*, "lamb," is rigidly followed in Nu. 7:15–87 and in the sacrificial calendar in 28:11–29:17. The construct form *par ben baqar*, "young bull" (which occurs 30 times in the OT) appears exclusively in P and Ezekiel. In the phrase *ben baqar*, *ben* can be understood as a determinative to convey the idea that what follows belongs to a certain species or class.¹⁹

c. In the expression *miqneh bhaqar* (RSV "flocks and herds," or "herds and flocks," Gen. 26:14; 47:17; Eccl. 2:7; 2 Ch. 32:29), *baqar* represents the uninterchangeable generic character, and *miqneh* assumes the collective function; the situation is different in Nu. 7:88.

5. *The LXX.* *baqar* is translated by the following words in the LXX: *boukólion*, "herd of cattle," 13 times; *boús*, "ox, cow," 101; *dámalis*, "heifer, young cow," 12; *kténos*, "domesticated animal," and *moschárion*, "little calf," twice each; and *móschos*, "calf, young bull," 33.

II

1. *baqar As a Domestic and Gregarious Animal.* Like all other cattle, *baqar* constitutes part of the possessions and wealth of the family and the tribe. The *baqar* appeared in Palestine first in the Late Stone Age, and is like the lean Arabic ox, which produced only a small amount of milk and meat. This animal was driven in herds. It consists of three breeds, to which the humpback ox also belongs. *baqar* appears for the first time in the OT as a possession of Abraham and Lot.

baqar is depicted as a material possession along with other animals and with *'abhadhim*, "menservants" (Gen. 12:16; 13:5 with *'ohalim*, "tents"; 20:14; 32:8 [7]; Eccl. 2:7), with animals and *'abhuddah*, "servants" (Gen. 26:14; Job 1:3), and with silver and gold (Gen. 24:35; 13:5). For Sarah's sake, the pharaoh dealt well with (*hetibh*) Abraham, who was rich in herds, "sheep, oxen,

he-asses, menservants, maidservants, she-asses, and camels" (Gen. 12:16; this is a literary addition of the Yahwist, whose intention is to prepare the reader for the consequence in Gen. 13). Lot's wealth is designated by connecting "flocks and herds" with *'ohel*, "tents," a combination that occurs only in Gen. 13:5 in the OT. Jacob returns to Palestine with herds giving suck (*baqar 'aloth*, 33:13). In ancient times, wealth was reckoned not in terms of money, arable land, or possession of houses, but in terms of cattle (cf. 12:16; 26:14; 30:43; 46:32; Dt. 3:19; 1 S. 25:2; Job 1:3). In lists of animals indicating a person's possessions, usually *tso'n*, "sheep," are mentioned first, and then *baqar*, "cattle." This provides another explanation for the reversal of these two terms in the priestly regulations, which were not concerned with the number of livestock a person had, but with the value of sacrificial animals. *tsemedh*, "a pair," was used as a standard term in computing the number of a person's livestock. The domestic servants which are necessary to work and to tend the animals are mentioned after the animals (Gen. 12:16; 26:14), because slaves are regarded not as legal individuals, but as legal objects and assets.

Gen. 24:35 (J) and Job 42:12 do not regard possessions and wealth as human achievements, but as blessings of Yahweh. Thus a list of possessions including *baqar* can also occur in an oracle of doom (Isa. 7:21), or one can confiscate another person's property (2 S. 12:2–4).

When Joseph expresses his desire that his family be near him (Gen. 45:10), he has in mind all the possessions of his family and household. Since the existence of his family is at stake, Joseph tells the pharaoh not only about his father and his brothers, but also about *tso'nam ubheqaram*, "their flocks and herds," and all that they possess (47:1). The existence and environment of a family and of an individual are affected when the cattle or the flocks are in danger. Thus, the pharaoh attempts to restrain the Israelites by making them leave their *tso'n ubhaqar*, "flocks and herds," behind while they go to serve Yahweh (Ex. 10:24); but Moses demands that he release them with all their possessions (12:32). According to Jonah 3:7, the king of Nineveh decrees an official repentance, in which the cattle are included, because they are part of the household and community of fate of the Ninevites, and therefore must participate in the process of fasting and repentance. In an oracle of doom in Jer. 5:14–17, the prophet speaks of the total destruction of the land, its inhabitants and its produce, including its flocks and herds (v. 17), because they are necessary to the continuation of life and of the household. In 3:24, a later glossator seems to have interpreted the "acquired property" (RSV, "all for which our fathers labored," *yeghia'*) as "their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters."

2. *baqar As a Work Animal*. In agriculture, the ox is the most important work animal. Elisha plowed with twelve yoke of oxen, which he abandoned when he met Elijah in order to follow him (1 K. 19:19, 21). According to 1 S. 11:5, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen (*baqar*). Job 1:14 tells of Job's servants plowing with oxen (*baqar choreshoth*).

Thus Dt. 21:3 explicitly states that only an ox (RSV "heifer") which has not been pulled in the yoke and which has never been worked can be offered as an atonement for murder and thus as a restoration to acceptance in the cult. The neck of the ox (heifer) was broken in this unique act of atonement. Thus, we are not dealing here with a sacrifice, but, in light of the way the animal was slaughtered and of the place where it was slaughtered, with a "magical process for removing a sin."

The Ark Narrative preserves the tradition that oxen pulled the cart carrying the ark of the covenant, but the oxen put it in danger (*shamat*, RSV "stumbled"; cf. 1 Ch. 13:9). Therefore,

baqar, “oxen,” were not as suitable for pulling a cart as *paroth ‘aloth*, “milch cows,” which did not get off the road (cf. 1 S. 6:7, 10, 12).

3. *Meat and Sour Milk*. However, the value of a cow depended not only on its ability to work, but also on its production of meat and milk. To the three travellers who came to his tent, Abraham served *ben baqar*, “a calf,” meal, flat cakes, soft butter, and milk, to show his hospitality (Gen. 18:7). In this original narrative, the young calf is described as especially tender and good (*rakh vatobh*). *baqar* appears along with natural produce and meal as a part of the royal meal that was eaten when David was exalted by his mighty men as king over Israel in Hebron (1 Ch. 12:41[40]).

The significance of this sort of meal, which is composed of *baqar* in particular, is also shown in 1 K. 1:9: *baqar*, “oxen,” together with *tso’n*, “sheep,” and *meri*, “fatlings,” are used for a communal meal which Adonijah, as David’s successor, must proclaim. At Solomon’s court, the daily consumption of ten fat oxen (*baqar beri’im*) and twenty pasture-fed cattle (*baqar re’i*) was common (5:3[4:23]). However, we do not have more precise information about this. Probably these numbers simply indicate the huge size of Solomon’s royal household.

In Joel 1:18, *baqar* is not part of the luxury of a rich royal household, but, like the grain of the granary and the seed of the field, a vital necessity for man. Therefore, the fact that the livestock are perplexed by the distress is a sign of the imminent day of judgment over Israel. In this text, → **בהמה** *b^ehēmāh*, “beasts,” is used in parallelism with the herds of *baqar*, and flocks of *tso’n*, “sheep,” which are mentioned afterward. In this antithesis, again *baqar* can only mean the species “cow” or “ox,” which was put in jeopardy especially because of the dryness of the pastures. When Moses complains to Yahweh because the Israelites do not have meat to eat in the wilderness (Nu. 11:22, J), he receives the promise of divine help which will “more than satisfy” their craving. Thus the narrative expresses the idea that a miracle of the “divine hand” will take place and even Moses himself will be astonished.

Dt. 14:4 explicitly allows the Israelites to eat beef, which indicates that a *baqar*, “ox, cow,” can be slaughtered in a purely secular sense, and its meat can be used to provide nourishment. This is confirmed by similar examples in 1 K. 19:21 and in the accusation in Isa. 22:13. In addition to the meat, the *chem’ath baqar*, “curds from the herd” (Dt. 32:14), and the *shephoth baqar*, “cheese from the herd” (2 S. 17:29), were also eaten. The herds of Bashan (Dt. 32:14) were regarded as especially fat and fine domestic animals. Not only do OT writers know of cattle in the pastures (cf. Joel 1:18), but also of fattening cattle in stalls (cf. Hab. 3:17).

4. *baqar in Commerce, Law, and Treaties*. The importance of cattle in commerce, law, and treaties is clear when Joseph exchanges bread for cattle in the time of the famine (Gen. 47:17). David in particular sets a royal official over the herds of cattle (*baqar*, 1 Ch. 27:29). David bought *baqar*, “oxen,” from Araunah for silver (2 S. 24:24).

In harmony with this, a particularly high restitution is required for stealing an animal because of its high value, and, of course, also as a punishment for a deliberate violation of the law: five oxen for one ox (Ex. 21:37[22:1]).

Finally, *baqar*, “oxen,” are also used in connection with making a covenant or a treaty, as, e.g., when Abraham made a covenant with Abimelech and gave him *tso’n ubhaqar*, “sheep and

oxen” (Gen. 21:27; cf. also 15:8ff.). Saul symbolically cuts an ox (*baqar*) in pieces in order to bind the tribes to put forth a united effort (1 S. 11:7).

5. *baqar* As Booty. *baqar* is mentioned frequently in the OT as a part of the booty (→ **בַּזָּז** *bāzaz*) taken by a conquering army, and with two exceptions (Nu. 31:28 and Job 1:14) always follows *tso'n*, “sheep” (Nu. 31:33, 38, 44; 1 S. 14:32; Gen. 34:28; 1 S. 30:20). In such contexts, twice it appears in connection with *chamorim*, “asses” (Nu. 31:28; Gen. 34:28); once each with *ha'adham*, “persons” (Nu. 31:28), and *'athonoth*, “asses” (Job 1:14), and once with a collective idea, viz., *'eth 'asher ba'ir ... bassadheh*, “whatever was in the city and in the field” (Gen. 34:28). Here also *baqar* is to be understood as a species in contrast to *'adham*, “man,” and *tso'n*, “sheep.” The twofold appearance of *baqar* in 1 S. 14:32 is worthy of note. First of all, *baqar* is used in the general sense to refer to a species, and is not defined more precisely with regard to sex, age, or quality. Then the *bene bhaqar*, lit. “sons of cattle” (RSV “calves”), are mentioned, which are distinguished from the general species “cattle or oxen” by referring to age, “young cow or ox.” *baqar* also occurs in the sense of the species “cattle or oxen” in connection with the ban or devoted thing (15:9, 14, 15, 21; 27:9).

6. *baqar* in Figures for Peace. In Isa. 11:7, the restoration of peace between man and beast is illustrated by the figure of the peaceable coexistence of animals. The lion shall eat straw like the ox (cf. Isa. 65:25). The strained relationships between men and animals which presently exist will be overcome and the original situation in Paradise will be restored.

III

1. *baqar* As a Sacrificial Animal. *baqar* plays a special role as a sacrificial animal in the laws concerning sacrifice. The condition and suitability of the sacrificial animals are important to priest and layman alike.

a. The expression *baqar tamim*, “ox (cow) without blemish,” is used 16 times in the OT (always in the priestly regulations) to describe the quality essential to a sacrificial animal. The ideas included in this phrase are described in detail in Lev. 22:17–25: → **תָּמִים** *tāmîm*, “complete, whole, entire,” is a technical term in sacrificial language (1:3, 10; 3:1, 6, 9; 4:3, 23, 28, 32; etc.). This “completeness, wholeness,” is defined by the exclusion of six defects in the animal in 22:22 (cf. 21:18–20). Under these provisions, *baqar* is used as a sacrificial animal mainly in three types of sacrifices.

It is used in the burnt-offering (*'olah*: Lev. 1:3; 23:18; Nu. 15:3, 8, 24; 28:11, 19, 27; 29:2, 8, 13; Dt. 12:6; Nu. 7:15, 21, 27, 33, 39, 45, 51, 57, 63, 69, 75, 81, 87; 2 S. 24:22; Ps. 66:15; 1 Ch. 21:23), in which the whole ox was burned.

It is used in sacrifices involving a communal meal (*zebhach*, “sacrifice,” *zebhach shelamim*, “peace offering”: Lev. 22:21; 3:1; Nu. 15:3, 8; Dt. 12:6; 16:2; 1 S. 15:15; 16:2; 1 K. 8:63; 19:21; 2 Ch. 7:5; 15:11; Nu. 22:40; 1 K. 19:20; 2 Ch. 18:2), in which the animal was divided up between Yahweh, the priests, and those offering the sacrifice; cf. the sacrifice of oxen with a communal meal in Lev. 3:1–5, and the sacrifice of sheep with a communal meal in 3:6–11. Whereas the ox offered for a burnt-offering can only be a male (hence the addition of *zakhar*, “male,” in 1:3;

22:19), the regulations pertaining to a sacrifice involving a communal meal also allow a female animal to be offered (*neqebhah*, “female,” 3:1).

baqar lechatta'th is a sacrifice in the form of “an ox (RSV young bull) for a sin-offering” (Lev. 4:3, 14; 9:2; Nu. 8:8; Lev. 16:3; Nu. 15:24; Ezk. 45:18), which in particular atones for sins (committed unwittingly) against the commandments (*mitsvah*) with a blood rite.

In P, *qorban*, “offering,” includes the burnt-offering and the sacrifice involving a communal meal. The *qorban baqar*, “offering from the herd,” is sacrificed in particular to atone for the sins of the high priest and of the people. In the burnt-offering, the animal is chosen (*laqach*, lit. “taken”) from the species *baqar* to be a *qorban*, and is brought to be slaughtered (*shachat*) before the door of the tent of meeting (Lev. 1:3).

b. A stereotyped series of sacrifices seems to have been developed corresponding to the sacrificial calendar (Nu. 28f.). In this series, *baqar*, as a valuable animal, is always mentioned in first place. The content of Nu. 28f. presupposes texts from the exilic and postexilic periods, and must be dated after 15:1–16. This collection of cultic and ritual regulations concerning the addition of cereal-offerings and drink-offerings (Nu. 15), with a parallel expression *'ishsheh layhvh 'olah 'o zebhach (shelamim)*, “an offering by fire to Yahweh for a burnt-offering or for a sacrifice (or for a peace-offering)” (15:3, 8), goes beyond Lev. 1–7, because it contains regulations not only for animal- and cereal-offerings, but also for drink-offerings. “The scale of values of the sacrificial animals rises from the (male) sheep, via the ram to the bull....” But even in earlier lists of sacrifices, *baqar* is mentioned at the beginning (cf. Lev. 1:2, redactor). In a construct expression typical of the law of centralization of the cult, Dt. 12:6 speaks of *bekhoroth baqar*, “the firstlings of the herd.” A comparison with the lists of sacrifices used for the sin-offering (Lev. 4:3, 14; 9:2; 16:3) shows that in the main offerings oxen (RSV “young bulls”) were used as sacrificial animals, and that (after a sheep and a ram) a *par ben baqar*, “young bull,” was regarded as the most valuable sacrificial animal. In opposition to Lev. 4:22–35, the first P redactor²⁶ has also expanded the law with a new regulation concerning the sin-offering of the *qahal*, “congregation.” In doing this, in keeping with sacrificial procedure, he replaced “young bull” (*par*), “originally probably any young male animal,” with *se'ir 'izzim*, “goat,” and, as in 16:3 and 23:18, assigned it to the species *baqar*.

c. In this process of expanding earlier regulations, the expression *par ben baqar*, “young bull of the species ox (or cattle)” (Lev. 4:3, 14; 16:3; 23:18; Nu. 7 [12 times]; Ezk. 43:19, 23, 25; etc.) came to be used in legal language as a technical term for the main sacrificial animal. P probably intentionally avoided the related term *'eghel*, “calf,” because of the criticism of the cult places Dan and Bethel: Lev. 9:3 does mention the young bull (*'eghel*), but this comes from an earlier stratum. However, in the literary expansion in 9:2, this has been corrected by the addition of *ben baqar*, so that when all is said and done the young bull is not used at all in P. Ezekiel and supplementary laws like Nu. 15:24 are oriented toward this legal language. In the context of the legislation concerning the centralization of the cult, *baqar* takes on a theologico-historical relevance in Dt. 16:2, for in connection with *zabhash pesach*, “you shall offer the passover,” it indicates that an official community festival at the central cult place arose out of the passover as a family festival. *zabhash*, “to offer, sacrifice,” is usually connected with *ben baqar*, “calf,” i.e., a special relationship or communion was supposed to have been expressed by the slaughter of the

ox or young bull and the meal that was connected with it. Thus, e.g., according to Nu. 22:40, Balak tried to establish a fateful communion with Balaam by sacrificing oxen and sheep.

2. *Images and Representations of a baqar.* According to 1 K. 7:44 (par. 2 Ch. 4:15), 25 (2 Ch. 4:3); and 2 K. 16:17, the bronze sea was carried by twelve oxen. Ornaments with lions and oxen were set in the frames of the ten stands of bronze (1 K. 7:29). The captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard had these representations broken in pieces when the Babylonians destroyed the temple (Jer. 52:20).

Beck