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John Gee

Kerry Muhlestein

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Author(s) Kerry Muhlestein and John Gee

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Abstract The plausibility of the attempted offering of Abraham by a priest of pharaoh and the existence of human sacrifice in ancient Egypt have been questioned and debated. This paper presents strong evidence that ritual slaying did exist among ancient Egyptians, with a particular focus on its existence in the Middle Kingdom. It details three individual evidences of human sacrifice found in ancient Egypt. Four different aspects of the attempted offering of Abraham are compared to these Egyptian evidences to illustrate how the story of Abraham fits with the picture of ritual slaying in Middle Kingdom Egypt.

AN EGYPTIAN CONTEXT FOR THE SACRIFICE OF ABRAHAM

KERRY MUHLESTEIN AND JOHN GEE



This gilded bed in the shape of a lion is from King Tutankhamun's tomb (ca. 1300 bc); it is probably the finest (and earliest) known example of a lion couch from ancient Egypt.

The existence of human sacrifice in ancient Egypt has been variously debated and denied. While Egyptologists generally admit that the practice existed in the formative periods of Egyptian society,¹ opinions among Egyptologists for later time periods range from claiming that “there is no certain evidence for the practice of human sacrifice . . . from the Old Kingdom onwards”² to asserting that there is “indisputable evidence for the practice of human sacrifice in classical ancient Egypt.”³ However difficult it may be for modern

societies to accept that a practice we detest, such as human sacrifice, occurred in past civilizations we admire,⁴ further research and discoveries necessitate a reassessment of the possibility of this practice within Egyptian culture. While there is not a universally accepted definition of human sacrifice, for the purposes of this paper we will define human sacrifice as the slaying of a person in a ritual context.

Understanding this definition is somewhat hampered by a modern tendency to compartmentalize that which ancient societies were not prone to view



In this facsimile from the Book of Abraham, Abraham is on a similar-looking lion couch, which “was made after the form of a bedstead” (Abraham 1:13). Facsimile 1, July 1842 *Millennial Star*. © IRI.

Cairo Egyptian Museum JE 62911. Photograph © Sandro Vannini.

separately (for all practical purposes, religion and civil government in ancient Egypt were one and the same). Whereas we make a distinction between execution and human sacrifice, this point of view was not necessarily the case with ancient Egyptians, at least partly because what we call “religious” aspects of culture they saw as just part of life. Any person deemed worthy of death would have been viewed as someone affecting both social and religious spheres, and hence his or her death would have both social and religious ramifications. All known cases of executions from ancient Egypt carry with them trappings

The story presented in the Book of Abraham matches remarkably well with the picture of ritual slaying in Middle Kingdom Egypt.

of ritual and/or religious actions. Consequently, our definition of human sacrifice accounts for this by recognizing the ritual context of slaying, regardless of whether modern society would think of a given act as execution rather than human sacrifice. If ritual and religious aspects are present in the slaying of a person, then we will consider it human sacrifice.⁵

Furthermore, studies in Egyptian ritual and sacrifice have been hampered by a lack of differentiation between daily offerings and other types of sacrifices such as those involved in festivals⁶—a distinction that also needs to be made regarding the possibility of human sacrifice. Ancient Egyptian rituals occurred at both regular intervals (such as festivals)⁷ and irregular intervals (such as in celebrations of military victories, or rituals enacted against dangerous threats). While it is theoretically possible that ancient Egypt could have had regular programs and irregular individual occasions of human sacrifice, none of the evidence from the Middle Kingdom requires a regular program of human sacrifice; indeed,

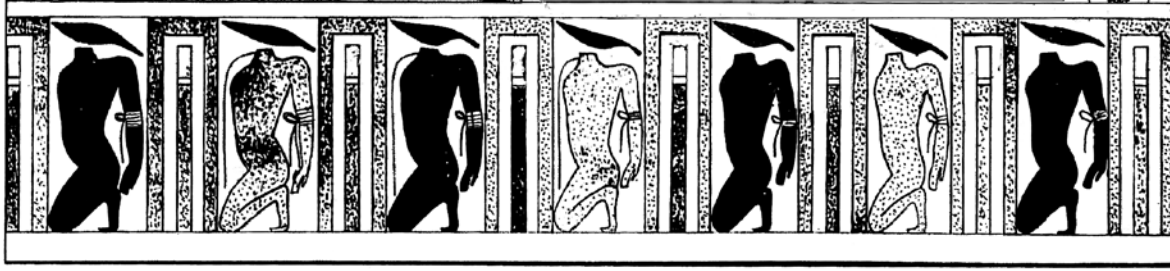
most of the evidence points to sacrifice having been an exceptional occurrence. We present this evidence in a topical order (from prescription to practice) rather than in chronological order.

While there is evidence for the practice of ritual slaying from all eras of Egyptian history,⁸ for this paper we will focus on the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2000–1750), which is the period during which Abraham most likely lived. Thus it is useful to compare the known historical evidence from Middle Kingdom Egypt to evidence presented in the Book of Abraham. We will show that the story presented in the Book of Abraham matches remarkably well with the picture of ritual slaying in Middle Kingdom Egypt. We begin with the Egyptian evidence.

1. A Middle Kingdom boundary stone inscription at Abydos written by the pharaoh Ugaf (1761–1759 BC)⁹ and later usurped by Neferhotep I (1737–1726 BC)¹⁰ instructs that “anyone who shall be found inside these boundary stones except for a priest about his duties shall be burnt.”¹¹ The archaeological context of the inscription shows that the boundary stones that marked “sacred land” were part of a processional route between the temple and the cemetery.¹² Those trespassing on sacred land were to be put to death by burning. While it is not known whether this law was ever violated and the punishment meted out, the penalty of being burned to death was part of Egyptian law; the decree carries ritual implications, especially in light of evidence presented below concerning burning. While our modern tendency is to compartmentalize various types of activities, we must divest ourselves of this compulsion when trying to understand ancient cultures. If an ancient Egyptian had broken this decree, it would have had “religious” implications. It is thus likely that any response would also have had religious connotations. In such cases the distinction between ritual slaying and execution may be meaningless. In the

FROM THE EDITOR:

The specter of human sacrifice is so repugnant that few people do not recoil from such a practice. One such sacrifice, the attempted offering of Abraham by the priest of pharaoh, however, has raised the question of whether or not the Egyptians ever indulged in such uncivilized and disgusting behavior. Drs. Kerry Muhlestein and John Gee present evidence that such a practice among ancient Egyptians was indeed performed.



Bound and decapitated captives depicted in the tomb of Ramses IX. The iconography of these figures matches not only the descriptions of the execration rite, but also the execration figurines themselves (see page 75), as well as the archaeological remains of those rites.

following cases we can be certain of the presence of religious trappings during the slaying of a human. In regards to the Ugaf decree, we cannot be as certain. And while we will note that ritual connotations are implied, the idea of distinguishing between a sanctioned slaying with or without ritual connotations was probably a foreign idea to those who made the decree.

We cannot know if this decree was ever enforced. What is important for our purposes, however, is to understand that the inscription rises from a milieu in which slaying someone for desecration of sacred space was an accepted practice with ritual connotations.

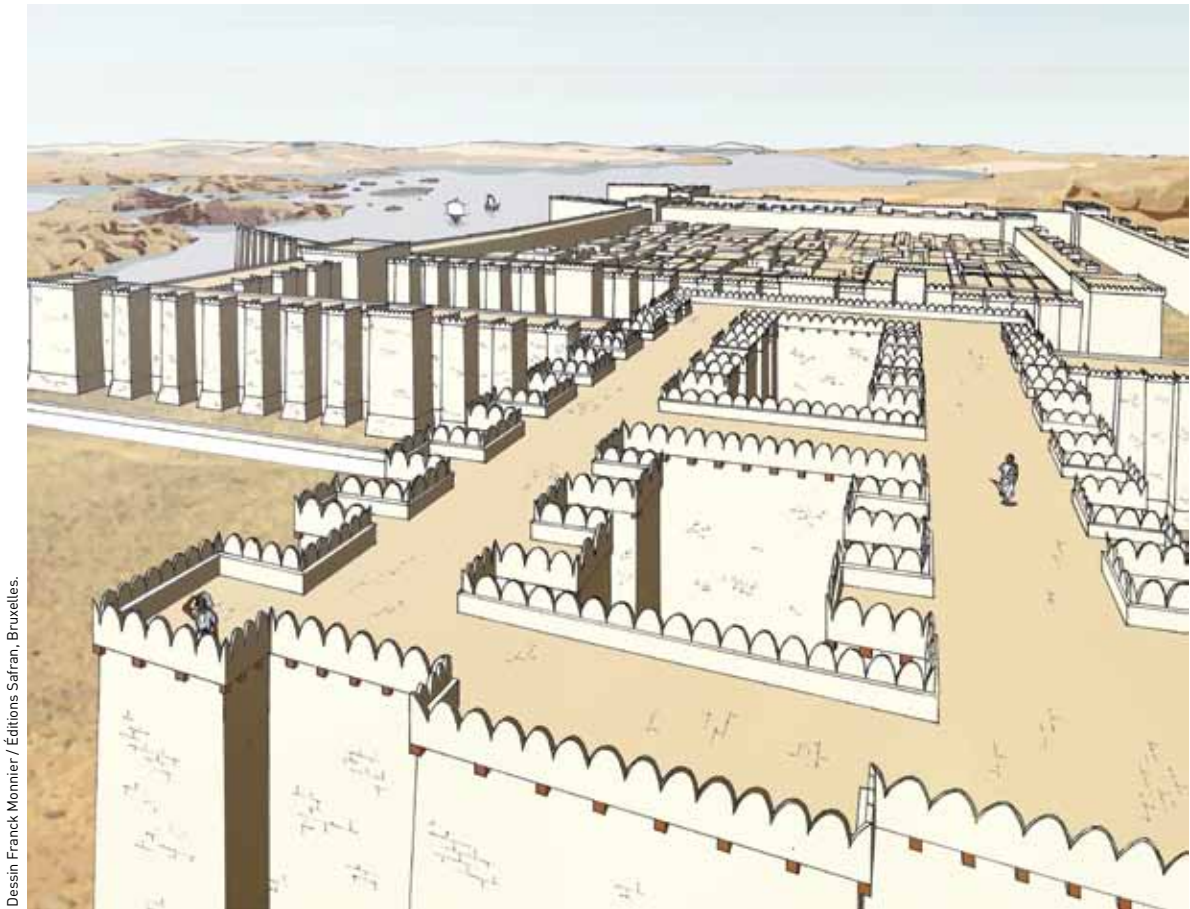
2. That the penalty of human sacrifice (including burning) was carried out in some circumstances can be shown from a historical account left by Sesostri¹³ I (1953-1911 BC).¹⁴ Sesostri I recounts finding the temple of Tod in a state of both disrepair and intentional desecration, something he attributed to Asiatic/Semitic interlopers he thus deemed as enemies.¹⁵ In response, he submits the purported perpetrators to varying punishments: flaying, impalement, beheading, and burning. He informs us that “[the knife] was applied to the children of the enemy (*ms.w hrwy*), sacrifices among the Asiatics.”¹⁶ Sesostri intended a sacrificial association to be applied to the executions he had just enacted.¹⁷ This point is augmented by the fact that some temple sacrifices were consumed by fire.¹⁸ While a lacuna makes it impossible to be certain, some of the victims may even have been stabbed with a knife before being burned. In other eras of Egyptian history, this practice of burning seems to have been carried out when ritually slaying a human.¹⁹ Clearly, when the sacred house of a god had been desecrated, the Egyptian king responded by sacrificing those responsible.

3. Finally, archaeologists have discovered evidence of human sacrifice. Just outside the Middle

Kingdom fortress at Mirgissa, which had been part of the Egyptian empire in Nubia, a deposit was found containing various ritual objects such as melted wax figurines, a flint knife, and the decapitated body of a foreigner slain during rites designed to ward off enemies. Almost universally, this discovery has been accepted as a case of human sacrifice.²⁰ Texts from this and similar rites from the Middle Kingdom specify that the ritual was directed against “every evil speaker, every evil speech, every evil curse, every evil plot, every evil imprecation, every evil attack, every evil rebellion, every evil plan, and every evil thing,”²¹ which refers to those who “speak evil” of the king or of his policies.²² The remains in the deposit are consistent with those of later ritual texts

It is clear that during the Middle Kingdom, Egyptians engaged in [ritual slaying] when they deemed it necessary, and that desecrations or perceived threats were some of the situations that seemed to justify the ritual slaughter of humans.

describing the daily execration rite, which was usually a wax figure substituting in effigy for a human sacrifice: “Bind with the sinew of a red cow . . . spit on him four times . . . trample on him with the left foot . . . smite him with a spear . . . decapitate him with a knife . . . place him on the fire . . . spit on him in the fire many times.”²³ Again we see that the use of a knife was followed by burning. The fact that the site of Mirgissa is not in Egypt proper but was part of the Egyptian empire in Nubia informs us that the Egyptians extended such practices beyond their borders.



Dessin Franck Monnier / Editions Safran, Bruxelles.

Artist's reconstruction of the Middle Kingdom fortress at Mirgissa, just outside Nubia. Archaeologists have discovered evidence of human sacrifice at the site, including ritual objects and the decapitated body of a foreigner slain during rites to ward off enemies.

In fact, throughout time we find that ritual violence was often aimed at foreign places and people.²⁴ Their very foreignness was seen as a threat to Egypt's political and social order. Hence many of the known examples of ritual slaying are aimed at foreigners, such as those at Mirgissa or Tod. All three examples we have shared involve protecting sacred places and things, such as the boundary of a necropolis, a temple, or even Egypt itself.

In summary, certain traits demonstrated by the three individual cases of human sacrifice from the Middle Kingdom deserve notice:

- A. The ritual nature of the sacrifice is clear in both the Sesostri I and Mirgissa cases and is implied in the Ugaf case.
- B. In two of the cases, the sacrifice is for cultic offenses; lack of clear inscriptional evidence prevents a determination in the Mirgissa case.

- C. In the two cases with inscriptions, the pharaoh is involved and the sacrifice is under his orders. The specific ritual context of the third case also argues for sacrifice for rebellion against the pharaoh.
- D. The sacrifice could take place both in Egypt proper and outside the boundaries in areas under Egyptian influence, as discussed above.

This picture of Middle Kingdom Egyptian culture can lend some insight into the life of Abraham since the normal time period assigned to Abraham roughly coincides with this era.²⁵ The first chapter of the Book of Abraham describes his near sacrifice by an Egyptian priest.²⁶ There are some elements worth comparing. In the case of Abraham:

- A. The ritual nature of the sacrifice is clear from the text, which describes it as an "offering"

Drawing courtesy Kerry Muhlestein.



Egyptian execration figurine found at Saqqara, 19th–20th century bc. Execration figurines were usually wax figures substituting in effigy for a human sacrifice; this one, however, was made of clay.

(Abraham 1:7–9, 11, 15) and a “sacrifice” (Abraham 1:7); it is even termed a “thank-offering” in one case (Abraham 1:10); and “it was done after the manner of the Egyptians” (Abraham 1:11), indicating that something about the way the sacrifice was enacted was Egyptian (as opposed to local or Mesopotamian) in nature.

B. The sacrifice is arguably for cultic offenses: Abraham’s fathers “were wholly turned” to the “worshiping of the gods of the heathen,” including “the god of Pharaoh, king of Egypt” (Abraham 1:5–6), and Abraham says that his fathers “utterly refused to hearken to my voice” (Abraham 1:5). Thus he had apparently been decrying such practices. Other ancient sources indicate that Abraham had desecrated or destroyed sacred, idolatrous objects.²⁷ While we must be careful in our evaluation of these non-canonical accounts, their number and consistency at least deserve notice. In any case, Abraham was clearly actively working against the religious order of his day. These actions would have been perceived as a threat against Egyptian cultural and cultic practices and potentially could have subjected Abraham to the execration rite as a human sacrifice. His story shares similarities with the Tod and Ugarit inscriptions in that the desecration of the sacred

was deserving of a death sentence, a death that would be carried out with ritual trappings.

- C. The pharaoh was somehow involved (Abraham 1:20), as evidenced by the fact that the sacrifice was attempted through his representative, “the priest of Pharaoh” (Abraham 1:7, 10; compare 1:20), and that pharaoh took an interest in the results.
- D. The sacrifice takes place outside the boundaries of Egypt but in an area under Egyptian influence (Abraham 1:1, 10, 20).²⁸

Because of the temporal and categorical proximity of Middle Kingdom examples of human sacrifice, we can now come closer to an understanding of Egyptian ritual slaying and the story presented in the first chapter of the Book of Abraham. It is clear that during the Middle Kingdom, Egyptians engaged in such practices when they deemed it necessary, and that desecrations or perceived threats were some of the situations that seemed to justify the ritual slaughter of humans. This picture matches well with that depicted in the Book of Abraham. Our understanding of the picture painted by each context can now be informed by the other, allowing us to more fully understand each individual story and the larger context in which these people lived their lives and practiced their religious beliefs. ■



Kerry Muhlestein received his PhD in Egyptology from UCLA. He is an associate professor of ancient scripture, teaches classes in ancient Near Eastern studies, and is the associate chair of the Department of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University. He is the director of the BYU Egypt Excavation Project and has held office in the American Research Center in Egypt.



John Gee is a senior research fellow and the William (Bill) Gay Professor of Egyptology at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University, and chair of the Egyptology and Ancient Israel section of the Society of Biblical Literature. He is the author of numerous articles on Egyptology and has edited several books and journals.

NOTES

1. By this we mean the earliest Egyptian dynasties, and even the era just before this. See David O'Connor, *Abydos: Egypt's First Pharaohs and the Cult of Osiris* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), 148–49; A. J. Spencer, *Early Egypt: The Rise of Civilisation in the Nile Valley* (London: British Museum, 1993), 71–72, 76–80, 96–97; Michael A. Hoffman, *Egypt before the Pharaohs: The Prehistoric Foundations of Egyptian Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 1979), 275–79; Walter B. Emery, *Archaic Egypt* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1961), 59, 62, 66, 68, 71, 73, 80–81, 85, 87, 90, 135–39; Jean Yoyotte, “Héra d’Héliopolis et le sacrifice humain,” *Annuaire, École Pratique des Hautes Études*, V^e section 89 (1980–81): 36; W. M. Flinders Petrie, *The Royal Tombs of the First Dynasty* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1900), 8, 11, 13–15, plates LXI, LXIV.
2. Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson, *The Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 134.
3. Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1993), 162–63.
4. See René Girard, “Discussion,” in *Violent Origins: Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 109; and Patrick Tierney, *The Highest Altar: The Story of Human Sacrifice* (New York: Viking, 1989), 10, 22.
5. See Kerry Muhlestein, “Violence in the Service of Order: The Religious Framework for Sanctioned Killing in Ancient Egypt” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2003), 13–29 and 387–88.
6. This was also argued by Winfried Barta, *Die altägyptische Opferliste, von der Frühzeit bis zur griechisch-römischen Epoche* (Berlin: Hessling, 1963).
7. See, for example, the Medinet Habu temple calendar, which lists over 45 festivals in the first 138 days of the year; a convenient translation into English may be found in Sherif el-Sabban, *Temple Festival Calendars of Ancient Egypt* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 60–140.
8. See Muhlestein, “Violence in the Service of Order”; Yoyotte, “Héra d’Héliopolis et le sacrifice humain,” 31–102; Harco Willems, “Crime, Cult and Capital Punishment (Mo’alla Inscription 8),” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 76 (1990): 27–54; Anthony Leahy, “Death by Fire in Ancient Egypt,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 27 (1984): 199–206; Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 162–63; Alan R. Schulman, *Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards: Some Historical Scenes on New Kingdom Private Stelae* (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1988); Perla Fuscaldò, “Tell el-Dab’a: Two Execration Pits and a Foundation Deposit,” in *Egyptology at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), 1:185–88; and Kerry Muhlestein, “Royal Executions: Evidence Bearing on the Subject of Sanctioned Killing in the Middle Kingdom,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 51/2 (2008): 181–208; John Gee, “History of a Theban Priesthood,” in «*Et maintenant ce ne sont plus que des villages...*»: *Thèbes et sa région aux époques hellénistique, romaine et byzantine*, ed. Alain Delattre and Paul Heilporn (Brussels: Association Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 2008), 67–69; John Gee, “Execration Rituals in Various Temples,” in 8. *Ägyptologische Tempeltagung: Interconnections between Temples*, ed. Monika Dolińska and Horst Beinlich (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 67–80.
9. For Ugaf, see Kim S. B. Ryholt, *The Political Situation in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period c. 1800–1550 B.C.* (Copenhagen: Carsten Niebuhr Institute of Near Eastern Studies, University of Copenhagen, 1997), 341–42; Jürgen von Beckerath, *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen*, 2nd ed. (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1999), 88–89.
10. For Neferhotep I, see Ryholt, *Political Situation in Egypt*, 345–48; von Beckerath, *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen*, 96–97.
11. Stela Cairo JE 35256. For translation and commentary, see Anthony Leahy, “A Protective Measure at Abydos in the Thirteenth Dynasty,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 75 (1989): 43, 46; earlier editions of the text may be found in Frank T. Miosi, *A Reading Book of Second Intermediate Period Texts* (Toronto: Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities, 1981), 1–3.
12. Leahy, “Protective Measure at Abydos,” 49–54; a convenient map of the processional route may be found in Mark Collier and Bill Manley, *How to Read Egyptian Hieroglyphs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 54–56.
13. This same name is also often written in literature as Senusret or Senwosret.
14. For a transcription and translation of the text, see Donald B. Redford, “The Tod Inscription of Senwosret I and Early 12th Dynasty Involvement in Nubia and the South,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 17/1–2 (1987): 42–44; Christophe Barbotin and Jacques Jean Clère, “L’inscription de Sésostris I^{er} à Tôd,” *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 91 (1991): 9, and plate 32. Hannes Buchberger, “Sesostris I. und die Inschrift von et-Tôd? Eine philologische Anfrage,” in “*Von reichlich ägyptischem Verstande*”: *Festschrift für Waltraud Guglielmi zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Karola Zibeliuchen and Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 15–21, questions the dating of the inscription because of a number of grammatical and orthographic peculiarities that are difficult to explain in classical Middle Egyptian. He postulates a restoration of an older text in a later period. He does not adequately account for the presence of the name *Sesostris* in the text, a name that urges a Middle Kingdom context. Buchberger’s questions cast little doubt on its historicity or its original Middle Kingdom context.
15. As noted by Wolfgang Helck, “Politische Spannungen zu Beginn des Mittleren Reiches,” in *Ägypten—Dauer und Wandel: Symposium anlässlich des 75-jährigen Bestehens des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo, am 10. und 11. Oktober 1982* (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1985), 49, this text fits a typical Egyptian pattern of the king finding a state of chaos and heroically restoring order. Contra Helck, this does not mean that the text lacks historicity; in fact, the king would have felt compelled to dispel chaos and restore order in action as well as text. Writing of an event ideologically does not mean the event did not occur; instead it argues for the importance of the event, making it even more likely it was historical.

16. Line X+32. Restoration of “the knife” is Redford’s (“The Tod Inscriptions of Senwosret I,” 42–44) based on traces of text and the context.
17. Dennis D. Hughes, *Human Sacrifice in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 4, discusses the problem of the terminology of human sacrifice in the study of Greek religion and the semantic wrestle that scholars of that field have that parallels the terminology problem outlined in this study. He concludes that the cases in which humans are sacrificed in the place of animals, or in which the slaying of humans is described using language identical to animal sacrifice, undoubtedly should be referred to as human sacrifice.
18. Byron E. Shafer, “Temples, Priests, and Rituals: An Overview,” in *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron E. Shafer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 25. See Christopher Eyre, *The Cannibal Hymn: A Cultural and Literary Study* (Bolton: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 172–73. See also the Shipwrecked Sailor 55–56, in Adriaan de Buck, *Egyptian Reading-book* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1963), 101, where the sacrifice is designated as *sbi n sdt*, literally “what goes to the fire.”
19. See Prince Osorkon’s slayings in the Bubastite Portal, Annals of the High Priest Osorkon, inscription of Year 11 of Takelot II, cols. 35–36, as in Epigraphic Survey, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak, vol. III: Bubastite Portal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), plates 16 and 18–19; see Ricardo A. Caminos, *The Chronicle of Prince Osorkon* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1958), 48; also as in a measure protecting a stela: Papyrus Rylands IX 23/7–9, in F. Ll. Griffith, *Catalogue of the Demotic Papyri in the John Rylands Library* (London: University Press, 1909), 2:plate 40; 3:110, 250; Günther Vittmann, *Der demotische Papyrus Rylands 9* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 1:108, 196–99; 2:580–82.
20. See André Vila, “Un dépôt de textes d’envoûtement au moyen empire,” *Journal des Savants* 3 (1963): 135–60; and Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 161–65.
21. Berlin execration texts section p 1–9, in Kurt Sethe, *Die Ächtung feindlicher Fürsten, Völker und Dinge auf altägyptischen Tongefässchen des Mittleren Reiches* (Berlin: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1926), 71–72.
22. PT 23 §16.
23. P. Louvre 3129 B 44–48, in Siegfried Schott, *Urkunden mythologischen Inhalts* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1929), 5; compare P. Bremner Rhind 22/2, 9, 17, 23–24, 23/5, 12, in Raymond O. Faulkner, *Papyrus Bremner-Rhind* (Brussels: La Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1933), 42–47. See Gee, “History of a Theban Priesthood,” 67–69, and Gee, “Execration Rituals,” 67–80.
24. See Muhlestein, “Violence in the Service of Order,” all of chapter 10.
25. Evidence assembled in John Gee, “Overlooked Evidence for Sesostri III’s Foreign Policy,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 41 (2004): 23–31, can be combined with the information in Abraham 1 to date the events in that chapter more narrowly in the Middle Kingdom to either the reign of Sesostri III or the following reign of Amenemhet III; this is now supplemented by James P. Allen, “The Historical Inscription of Khnumhotep at Dahshur: Preliminary Report,” *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 352 (2008): 29–39. The astronomical information assembled in Ulrich Luft, *Die chronologische Fixierung des ägyptischen Mittleren Reiches nach dem Tempelarchiv von Illahun* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), allows the absolute dating of the two reigns: Sesostri III (1873–1854) and Amenemhet III (1855–1810).
26. In the past some Latter-day Saints have attempted to associate the human sacrifice in the Book of Abraham with the *sed*-festival, a ritual associated with renewal of kingship. The idea goes back to Hugh Nibley, “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price,” *Improvement Era*, September 1968–January 1970; these materials have subsequently been reprinted in *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000), and in *An Approach to the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2009). It has been kept alive in Latter-day Saint circles and may be found, for example, in the works of Allen J. Fletcher: *Two Articles on the Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham* (Stirling, Alberta, Canada: Fletcher, 1999), and Fletcher, *A Study Guide to the Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2006), 37–60. At one time Egyptologists, following the theories of James Frazier’s extremely influential *Golden Bough*, hypothesized that this festival might involve the ritual slaying of a substitute king. More recent evaluations of the *sed*-festival find no evidence of a substitute king, much less his ritual killing; see Erik Hornung and Elisabeth Stachelin, *Studien zum Sedfest* (Basel: Ägyptologisches Seminar der Universität Basel and Centre d’études orientales de l’Université de Genève, 1974), 59–61. Egyptologists have thus rejected the connection of human sacrifice with the *sed*-festival for at least a generation. Connection of the Book of Abraham with the *sed*-festival was problematic for other reasons because it took place only in Egypt, while the Book of Abraham repeatedly states that the attempted sacrifice of Abraham took place outside of Egypt (Abraham 1:1–20); see also John Gee, “Hugh Nibley and the Joseph Smith Papyri,” in Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2009), xxxiii–xxxv.
27. Many later sources also paint a picture that Abraham’s life was sought because he had broken down or otherwise desecrated idols; see John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, eds., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, Brigham Young University, 2001), 91, 125, 132, 140–44, and 171–72, for a few of many available examples. The other accounts are irrelevant to our analysis.
28. See Gee, “Overlooked Evidence for Sesostri III’s Foreign Policy,” 23–31; John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks, “Historical Plausibility: The Historicity of the Book of Abraham as a Case Study,” in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 70–72; Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Where Was Ur of the Chaldees?” in *The Pearl of Great Price: Revelations from God*, ed. H. Donl Peterson and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 119–36.