



## “A Young Goat in Its Mother’s Milk”? Understanding an Ancient Prohibition\*

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### Abstract

The passage *לֹא תִבְשֵׁל גְּדִי בַחֲלֵב אִמּוֹ* should be understood as “you shall not cook (for eating purposes) a sucking kid”. This is not only the meaning of the passage in the Covenant Code (Exod 23:19) and in the so-called “Privilegrecht” (Exod 34:26), but it was the way as well in which this passage was understood by the authors of Deuteronomy (Deut 14:21). Amos 6:4 seems to contain an early reference to the prohibition of the sucking kid.

### Keywords

Exod 23:19, Deut 14:21, meat and milk

The famous saying *לֹא תִבְשֵׁל גְּדִי בַחֲלֵב אִמּוֹ*, usually translated as “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk”, appears three times in the Hebrew Bible: in Exod 23:19, in Exod 34:26, and in Deut 14:21. In rabbinic law, as is well known, it became the scriptural proof for the *halakha* ruling that meat and milk must not be cooked and eaten together, e.g.:

כל הבשר אסור לבשל בחלב חוץ מבשר דגים וחגבים

All kinds of meat are forbidden to cook in milk, except fish and grasshopper.  
(mChul 8:1)

The connection between this *halakha* and the present passage seems to go back at least to the 2nd century CE, as is shown by the rendering of Exod

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\*) I am most grateful to my colleagues Simeon Chavel (Yale University), Klaus Koenen (Universität Köln), and Jacob L. Wright (Emory University), who commented on earlier versions of this paper. Their very valuable suggestions helped to improve it.

23:19; 34:26 in Targum Onkelos:<sup>1</sup> לא תיכלון בשר בחלב—“You shall not eat meat in milk”.

Nevertheless, both wording and context of the Hebrew text seem to show that this can hardly be the meaning which was originally intended. Moreover, even a comparison of the different rabbinic sources which discuss the interdict of mixing meat and milk suggests that both the *halakha* and its connection with the biblical text developed gradually and in successive stages only.<sup>2</sup>

It is thus no wonder that numerous scholars tried to find the original meaning of this passage. In spite of these endeavors, however, a convincing answer seems not yet to have been found and the question is still a matter of dispute. The different suggestions regarding the understanding of the saying under discussion here may be divided into three categories, depending on the textual basis they are relating to:

1. Suggestions proceeding from the Masoretic text and the meaning traditionally attributed to it: “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk”.
2. Suggestions proposing a textual basis different from the received text.
3. Suggestions proceeding from the received Hebrew text, but understanding it in a way different from the traditional one.

### 1. “You Shall Not Boil a Young Goat in Its Mother’s Milk”

The first category contains by far the largest and most diverse number of different explanations. Naturally, the different proposals which belong to this group attempt primarily the reconstruction of the supposed original context of the saying.

A humanitarian interpretation, first suggested by Philo of Alexandria, was followed most prominently by Menahem Haran. According to Haran, the context of the present prohibition should be reconstructed through connecting it with Exod 22:28-29, Lev 22:27-28 and Deut 22:6-7:

The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me. You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep: seven days it shall remain with its mother; on the eighth day you shall give it to me. (Exod 22:28b-29)

<sup>1)</sup> For the date of Targum Onkelos see U. Gleßner, *Einleitung in die Targume zum Pentateuch* (TSAJ 48; Tübingen, 1995), pp. 92f.

<sup>2)</sup> See R. Heckl, “*Heleb* oder *hālāb*? Ein möglicher Einfluß der frühjüdischen Halacha auf die Vokalisation des MT in Ex 23,19b; Ex 34,26b; Dtn 14,21b”, *ZAH* 14 (2002), pp. 144-158.

When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as the LORD's offering by fire. But you shall not slaughter, from the herd or the flock, an animal with its young on the same day. (Lev 22:27-28)

If you come on a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs, with the mother sitting on the fledglings or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. Let the mother go, taking only the young for yourself, in order that it may go well with you and you may live long. (Deut 22:6-7)

In Haran's eyes, all these laws (the offspring must remain with his mother seven days at least, the mother bird must not be taken out of the fledglings together with the young, and the kid shall not be boiled in the milk of its mother) are expressions of the same principle of respect towards the relationship between the mother and her offspring and therefore "a deliberate reminder of humane behavior".<sup>3</sup> This theory, however, seems to be weakened by serious flaws, as has been pointed out by Jacob Milgrom:

It may be true that one may not slaughter the dam and its young on the same day (Deut 22:28) but it is surely permitted on successive days. The newborn must be permitted to suckle for seven days (Deut 22:27; Exod 22:29), but on the eighth day it may be brought to the altar—even though it is still sucking. The mother bird and her fledglings or eggs may not be taken together (Deut 22:26), but surely they may be taken separately. By the same token, the mother goat can in no way be aware that her kid is boiling in her milk.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, building on the same Biblical verses, Milgrom suggested a different connection between them, following an earlier interpretation by C. M. Carmichael:<sup>5</sup>

The common denominator of all of these prohibitions is the fusion and confusion of life and death *simultaneously*. [...] the mother's milk, the life-sustaining food for her kid, should never become associated with its death.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> M. Haran, "Seething a Kid in Its Mother's Milk", *JJS* 30 (1979), p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible; New York et al., 1991), p. 739.

<sup>5</sup> C. M. Carmichael, "On Separating Life and Death: An Explanation of Some Biblical Laws", *HTR* 69 (1976), pp. 1-7.

<sup>6</sup> Milgrom, p. 741.

This interpretation, however, seems to imply a problem similar to that of the humanitarian interpretation, insofar as both do not fit the exact wording of the Biblical text: Milgrom's interpretation fails to explain why the kid-in-milk prohibition specifically refers to the milk of *his* mother.

A further interpretation was put forward by Othmar Keel. He suggested that the roots of the law under discussion go back to an ancient taboo originally extending to the mother animal and their sucking offspring. On account of this taboo, both were forbidden for offering.<sup>7</sup> Following Keel, Ernst Axel Knauf identified the tabooized mother animal with the goddesses Anat and Ashtart.<sup>8</sup> After having become incomprehensible, according to him, the saying was re-interpreted in Deuteronomy, then serving as a means of identification and delimitation from the non-Israelite festal habit of cooking meat in milk.

Obviously, there are several problems connected with the explanation as a taboo:

- The explanation that the interdict of “boiling a young goat in its mother's milk” is rooted in a taboo implies a highly speculative element from the outset, insofar as the context in which this interdict is transmitted (the text of the Hebrew bible in general, and the respective law codices in particular) contains no support in favor of this hypothesis.<sup>9</sup>
- More specifically, the Hebrew bible provides no sources which point either to a taboo of milk, or to the sacrificial use of milk.<sup>10</sup>
- The iconic evidence provided in Keel's book comes from the whole ancient orient, including ancient Greece and Egypt. He does not explain, however, why the special focus on the mother animal and its

<sup>7</sup>) See O. Keel, *Das Böcklein in der Milch seiner Mutter und Verwandtes im Lichte eines altorientalischen Bildmotivs* (OBO 33; Fribourg/Göttingen, 1980).

<sup>8</sup>) See E. A. Knauf, “Zur Herkunft und Sozialgeschichte Israels: Das Böcklein in der Milch seiner Mutter”, *Biblica* 69 (1988), pp. 153-169.

<sup>9</sup>) Similarly Labuschagne: “Keel claims to see a development from an original Canaanite sacrifice taboo to an expression of respect for the mother-young relationship [...] However, in my opinion, Keel is in this way distancing himself more and more from the literary context and at the same time also from the real *Sitz im Leben*”.—C. J. Labuschagne, “You Shall Not Boil a Kid in Its Mother's Milk: A New Proposal for the Origin of the Prohibition”, in F. García Martínez/A. Hilhorst/C. J. Labuschagne (eds.), *The Scriptures and the Scrolls: Studies in Honour of A. S. van der Woude* (VTSup 49; Leiden et al., 1992), p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>) See Heckl, p. 146.

young as attested by these images seems to stand in the context of a taboo solely in Ancient Israel.<sup>11</sup>

Knauf's proposal that the prohibition was a means of self-delimitation seems difficult insofar as it disregards the literal context of the Hebrew saying as well as its specific insistence that the young goat must not be cooked in the milk of *his* mother. Although a long line of exegetes, starting with Maimonides, suggested that "cooking a young goat in the milk of his mother" was a Canaanite cultic practice, there is no proof for this and the suggestion, therefore, should be dismissed.<sup>12</sup>

Proceeding from the observation that in the days immediately following the birth the milk of the mother is of a reddish color, Casper J. Labuschagne suspected that it was regarded as containing blood. Thus, he concluded, it was not allowed for cooking.<sup>13</sup> If this would be the right explanation, however, one should expect that not only the *cooking in* this milk would be forbidden, but rather the *use of* this milk for eating and drinking at all.<sup>14</sup> However, the Hebrew bible contains no traces of such a general prohibition.

Another suggestion focusing on the *realia* of milk-production was made by Ph. Guillaume. He suggested that Deut 14:21 should be understood as referring to cheese-making, meaning: "You shall not curdle (*qp'*) milk with rennet (*qbb*)".<sup>15</sup> However, although later *halakhic* thinking connected the kid-in-milk prohibition with the use of rennet for the purpose of curdling milk, there is no indication that this was the original meaning of the Biblical text.

We may conclude, therefore, that none of the proposals proceeding from the traditional reading, "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk", have been successful in identifying a historical background, a *Sitz im Leben* which really fits the passage. This difficulty was the point of departure for proposals which questioned the textual basis of the saying under discussion.

<sup>11</sup> Similarly M. Haran, "Das Böcklein in der Milch seiner Mutter und das säugende Muttertier", *ThZ* 41 (1985), pp. 153-157.

<sup>12</sup> See Milgrom, pp. 737-738.

<sup>13</sup> Labuschagne, pp. 14f.

<sup>14</sup> Similarly J. M. Sasson, "Ritual Wisdom? On «Seething a Kid in Its Mother's Milk»", in U. Hübner/E. A. Knauf (eds.), *Kein Land für sich allein: Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan: Israel/Palästina und Ebirnâri für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag* (OBO 186; Fribourg/Göttingen, 2002), p. 298.

<sup>15</sup> Ph. Guillaume, "Thou Shalt Not Curdle Milk with Rennet", *UF* 34 (2002), p. 215.

## 2. “You Shall Not Boil a Young Goat in Its Mother’s Fat”

Raik Heckl and Jack Sasson suggested, independently one from the other, that the word which appears in the Masoretic text as *ḥālāb* “milk” was originally intended to be vocalized *ḥēlēb* “(animal) fat”, thus arriving at the text “You shall not cook a kid in its mother’s fat”.<sup>16</sup> Both scholars see the preference of the reading *ḥālāb* “milk” over against *ḥēlēb* “fat” as a deliberate choice, aiming at a scriptural proof for the prohibition of mixing milk and meat.<sup>17</sup> Neither of the two, however, seems to have paid appropriate attention to the text-critical evidence.

It is true that the possibility of reading *ḥēlēb* “fat” instead of *ḥālāb* “milk” is mentioned in a discussion contained in the Babylonian Talmud:

R. Aha b. Jacob questioned that (saying): Is there anyone who does not accept the reading as determinant (אם למקרא)? Has it not been taught: “in the milk of its mother” in which verse you might read “in the fat”? (bSanh 4a)

This passage demonstrates that R. Aha b. Jacob, who was active in the 4th century CE, was of course aware of the possible vocalization *ḥēlēb* “fat” instead of *ḥālāb* “milk”. However, he regarded it as absurd that anyone would follow this vocalization and therefore used the case as an argument in favor of the assumption that the received reading tradition determines the understanding of the Biblical text. While this proves that the vocalization *ḥālāb* “milk” was already fixed in the 4th century CE, we do not possess any other, more ancient textual witnesses which would advocate the vocalization *ḥēlēb* “fat”.

As to the vocalization of the Hebrew text of the Torah, the oldest textual witness is the Septuagint. In general, the Greek translation of the Pentateuch is regarded as an important pre-Masoretic witness for the vocalization of the Hebrew text, insofar as it can be reconstructed on the basis of the Greek translation.<sup>18</sup> In the passage in question, the Septuagint contains the reading ἐν γάλακτι “in milk”. This demonstrates that the Greek translators of Exodus and Deuteronomy, who carried out their work in the 3rd/2nd century BCE,

<sup>16</sup> Heckl, p. 157; Sasson, p. 304.

<sup>17</sup> “Die Entstehung der jüdischen Halacha, die den gemeinsamen Genuß von Milch und Fleisch verbietet, hat die Verlesung von חלב als *ḥelēb* verfestigt” (Heckl, p. 157); Sasson, p. 306.

<sup>18</sup> See E. Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (Jerusalem Biblical Studies 3; Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 160-174, and St. Schorch, “The Septuagint and the Vocalisation of the Hebrew Text of the Torah”, in M. K. H. Peters (ed.), *XII Congress of the International Organisation for Septuagint and Cognate Studies Leiden 2004* (Septuagint and Cognate Studies 54; (Leiden/Boston, 2006), pp. 41-54.

read their Hebrew *Vorlage* with the same vocalization as transmitted by the Masoretic text. Although one may of course question the text-critical value of the vocalization implied by the Greek translation of the present passage, as both Heckl and Sasson did,<sup>19</sup> one should be aware that from a text-critical point of view there is no reason to do so, and the fact that both the MT and the LXX support the reading “milk” is rather a strong argument against the assumption that the original reading was “fat”.

This argument may even be strengthened by reference to a further very important textual witness, disregarded by both Heckl and Sasson. The Samaritan reading of the Torah is the only Hebrew witness outside the Masoretic tradition providing a complete vocalization and covering the entire Hebrew text of the Torah. Moreover, the Samaritan tradition developed virtually independently from the proto-Masoretic/Masoretic tradition and apparently remained untouched of its influences.<sup>20</sup> It is thus a very strong argument in favor of the reading contained in the MT and LXX that the Samaritans read *‘ālāb* “milk” instead of the suggested *ēlāb* “fat” in all three instances of the saying under discussion here:<sup>21</sup>

lā tēbaššəl gādi bālāb immu

This reading, although realized in a different Hebrew dialect,<sup>22</sup> is entirely identical with the Masoretic vocalization from a semantic point of view. Therefore, as to the text-critical evidence for this passage, we shall conclude that all the available textual witnesses confirm the vocalization “milk”. Having thus realized that any further exploration into the meaning of this enigmatic saying should proceed from the reading “milk”, we shall look for different ways in which it may be understood.

<sup>19</sup> Compare Heckl, p. 155, and Sasson, pp. 299f.

<sup>20</sup> For an assessment of the nature and the text-critical value of the Samaritan reading of the Torah, see St. Schorch, *Die Vokale des Gesetzes: Die samaritanische Lesetradition als Textzeugin der Tora. Band I: Genesis* (BZAW 339; Berlin/New York, 2004), pp. 39-61.

<sup>21</sup> The transcription is given according to Z. Ben-Hayyim, *The Literary and Oral Tradition of Hebrew and Aramaic amongst the Samaritans, Volume IV* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1972).

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed description of this dialect, see Z. Ben-Hayyim, *A Grammar of Samaritan Hebrew: Based on the Recitation of the Law in Comparison with the Tiberian and other Jewish Traditions* (revised edition in English with assistance from Abraham Tal) (Jerusalem, 2000). The establishing of the Samaritan reading of the Torah as a firm tradition dates back to the 2nd century BCE; see Schorch, 2004, pp. 39-61.

### 3. “You Shall Not Boil a Young Goat Which Is at Its Mother’s Milk”

Interestingly enough, an alternative was already suggested by Augustine of Hippo<sup>23</sup> and followed by Martin Luther in his German Bible translation of 1534.<sup>24</sup> They both took the phrase “in the milk of his mother” not as a qualifier of the verb, but as a qualifier of the nominal object, “young goat”, arriving at the understanding: “You shall not boil a young goat which is at its mother’s milk”, i.e. a kid which is sucking and not yet weaned. A few modern scholars favored the same solution, especially Hans Goedicke in his review of Keel’s book:

The sentence has one prepositional adjunct, which is universally taken adverbially, i.e., qualifying the verb. Just as in the sentence, “You shall not eat peaches in John’s garden” the prepositional adjunct can also qualify the object. When taken this way, the biblical passage is to be understood “You shall not cook the kid (which is) in the milk of its mother”.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, this suggestion was all too easily dismissed by other scholars. Thus, Labuschagne saw “linguistic difficulties”<sup>26</sup> in it, and Sasson judged that “this understanding goes against Hebrew idiomatics”.<sup>27</sup>

However, the syntagma “verb + object + prepositional phrase” with the prepositional phrase functioning as qualifier of the object is a well attested phenomenon in Biblical Hebrew, which is neither linguistically difficult nor against Hebrew idiomatics, as is generally acknowledged by Hebraists.<sup>28</sup> A few examples, pertaining to different prepositions, should suffice to demonstrate this:

<sup>23</sup> See J. Moorhead, “Cooking a Kid in Its Mother’s Milk: Patristic Exegesis of an Old Testament Command”, *Augustinianum* 37 (1997), pp. 266f. Chromatius of Aquileia, a contemporary to Augustine, had a similar understanding of the text, see op. cit., p. 268.

<sup>24</sup> In Luther’s translation, the text is as follows: “Und solt das boecklin nicht kochen, die weil es an seiner mutter milch ist” (Martin Luther, *Biblia Deusch*, 1534).

<sup>25</sup> H. Goedicke, “Review of Keel: *Das Böcklein in der Milch seiner Mutter* (1980)”, *JNES* 42 (1983), p. 303. A prominent predecessor of Goedicke is Eduard König in his commentary to the Book of Deuteronomy, see E. König, *Das Deuteronomium* (Kommentar zum Alten Testament; Leipzig, 1917), p. 127.

<sup>26</sup> Labuschagne, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Sasson, p. 296.

<sup>28</sup> See T. Muraoka, “A Syntactic Problem in Lev. XIX. 18b”, *JSS* 23 (1978), p. 291; A. Schüle, “*Kāmōkā*—der Nächste, der ist wie Du. Zur Philologie des Liebesgebots von Lev 19,18.34”, *KUSATU* 2001, pp. 115-120.

אֶת־

You have tested my heart (which is) toward You (לְבִי אֶתְךָ). (Jer 12:3)

ב־

So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD (הֵרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה). (1 Reg 11:6)

Let us lift our hearts and hands to God (who is) in heaven (אֵל אֵל בַּשָּׁמַיִם). (Lam 3:41)

כ־

You shall love your neighbor who is like you (לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ). (Lev 19:18)<sup>29</sup>

מִן

Then God said, Let the waters under the heavens (הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם) be gathered together into one place... (Gen 1:9)<sup>30</sup>

עַל־

You shall not take the mother which is (sitting) on the young (הָאִם עַל הַבָּנִים). (Deut 22:6)

Therefore, the translation “You shall not boil a young goat which is at its mother’s milk” definitely fits the rules of Hebrew syntax. Taken this way, the passage is perfectly understandable: A young goat which is still sustained by the milk of its mother shall not be boiled.

Some scholars opposed this understanding with the argument that a number of biblical verses imply that kids not yet weaned could be given for offering or were slaughtered. Therefore, a closer look extending to the respective co-texts appears necessary.

The laws of the Pentateuch do indeed contain two passages which allow or even demand the offering of an eight-day-old kid—obviously still sucking. The Covenant Code wants the firstborn to be given to YHWH on the eighth day after their birth (Exod 22:29). According to the Holiness Code, a young animal is fit for fire offering<sup>31</sup> from the eighth day onwards (Lev 22:27):

You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep (צֹאֲנֵךְ): seven days it shall remain with its mother; on the eighth day you shall give it to me (תִּתְּנֵנִי לִי). (Exod 22:29)

<sup>29</sup>) For this translation, see the two studies by Muraoka and Schüle, quoted above.

<sup>30</sup>) Interestingly enough, the similar phrase in Gen 1:7 uses a relative particle: הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לָרְקִיעַ.

<sup>31</sup>) For this translation of אִשָּׁה, see W. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament, bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Rudolf Meyer und Herbert Donner. 1. Lieferung א-ג* (Berlin et al., <sup>18</sup>1987), p. 106 sub voce אִשָּׁה.

When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as the LORD's offering by fire (קרבן אשה). (Lev 22:27)

A further passage from 1 Sam 7:9 may be read like an illustration to this last saying:

So Samuel took a sucking lamb (טלה חלב) and offered it as a whole burnt offering (עולה בליל) to the LORD.

However, all these passages imply a fundamental difference to the prohibition as expressed in Exod 23:19, 34:26 and Deut 14:21: Neither in the case of the firstborn according to the Covenant Code (Exod 22:29) nor in the case of the whole offering (Lev 22:27; 1 Sam 7:9) does the worshipper eat from the offering, nor does he have any other material share of it. The firstborn even belongs exclusively to YHWH from the outset, and giving it to the temple is only the expression thereof. While, therefore, the cases referred to in Exod 22:29, Lev 22:27 and 1 Sam 7:9 are not at all related to matters of food, the prohibition of the sucking kid is a dietary law from the outset: Both Exod 23:19 and 34:26 speak about seething meat for the purpose of eating at the temple during the pilgrimage, and most probably even more specifically about the pilgrimage during the Feast of Booths.<sup>32</sup> In Deut 14:21, the dietary context is even more obvious, since it ends a list of different kinds of meat which are not allowed for eating, following unclean birds (vv. 12-19) and meat of animals that died of itself (v. 21a). In both Exodus and in Deuteronomy, therefore, the saying relates to a dietary prohibition, although there is a significant difference between the two regarding its context and extent: Deut 14:21 expresses a general dietary prohibition, while in Exodus the prohibition is limited to the festal meal during the pilgrimage(s). In Exodus, therefore, the dietary prohibition is valid in a specific cultic context only.<sup>33</sup>

Most probably, the limited prohibition is the more ancient version of the two, the version in Deuteronomy being a secondary generalization.<sup>34</sup> But whatever text preserves the original version, the limitation of the prohibition

<sup>32</sup>) This was suggested by Haran, 1979, p. 34f.

<sup>33</sup>) This cultic context is even enforced and made explicit in the Samaritan version of Exod 23:19, where the prohibition is followed by an addition: *כי עשה זאת כזבח שכח ועברה היא לאלהי יעקב*—“for whoever is doing this, it is like a sacrifice of forgetting and indignation to the God of Jacob”.

<sup>34</sup>) See Haran, 1979, p. 33.

in Exodus was most probably related to the distinctiveness of the festal meal versus a normal meal.<sup>35</sup> The delimitation or generalization of the prohibition in Deuteronomy, on the other side, corresponds to Deuteronomy's tendency towards "secularization".<sup>36</sup> Being related to the cult in the Book of Exodus, the prohibition of the sucking kid was transformed by the Deuteronomist into a general dietary law.<sup>37</sup>

A further interplay between the laws of the Pentateuch should be observed: According to the laws in Deuteronomy, the firstborn kid is not to be *given to* the temple, as in Exod 22:29,<sup>38</sup> but it is, unlike in the Covenant Code, to be *eaten at* the temple:

Every firstling male born of your herd and flock you shall consecrate to the LORD your God; you shall not do work with your firstling ox nor shear the firstling of your flock. You shall eat it, you together with your household, in the presence of the LORD your God, year by year at the place that the LORD will choose. (Deut 15:19-20)

From the perspective of the Torah as a whole, therefore, the interpretation of גדי בחלב אמו as "sucking kid" would collide with the ruling in the Covenant Code that the firstborn has to be brought to the temple eight days after its birth (Exod 22:29). Within Deuteronomy, however, the situation is different: Deuteronomy has no parallel to the eight-day regulation and does not even contain any separate ruling concerning the age at which the firstborn is to be brought to and eaten at the temple. Thus, Deut 14:21 applies to the meal prepared of the firstborn as to any other: According to Deuteronomy, the firstborn kid can be prepared as a festal meal only after it has ceased to be sustained by the milk of its mother. If so, the prohibition of the sucking kid in Deut 14:21 is different from its parallels in Exodus in two regards:

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<sup>35</sup> Since the annual pilgrimages, and especially the Feast of Booths, are characterized by their joyful remembering of creation and procreation, it seems reasonable to relate the prohibition of preparing a meal from a sucking goat to this event, be it, as Menahem Haran thought, a "rather deliberate reminder of humane behaviour even in the midst of general jollity" (Haran, 1979, p. 35), or be it somehow connected to the intention not to harm the relation between mother and kid.

<sup>36</sup> See M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 190-243.

<sup>37</sup> Compare Milgrom, p. 741.

<sup>38</sup> See above.

- It is transformed into a general dietary prohibition.
- It replaces the regulation concerning the age at which the firstborn has to be offered as provided in the Covenant Code (Exod 22:29).

The former was achieved in a most obvious way by re-contextualizing the prohibition of the sucking kid within the literary context of the dietary laws of Deut 14:1-21. The latter, too, has left its traces in the literary structure and may be revealed through a comparison between Exod 22 and Deut 14:

Exod 22	Deut 14
29a Firstborn to be given to YHWH	21aa carcasses not to be eaten
29b At the 8th day	21ab Israelites = holy people
30a Israelites = holy men	21b Sucking goat
30b torn animals not to be eaten	22-23 Tithe and Firstborn to be eaten at the temple

In Exod 22:28-30, the text consists of four subsequent components: verse 29a speaks about the firstborn animal, verse 29b says that it has to be given to the Lord at the eighth day after its birth, verse 30a demands that the Israelites should be holy men (אנשי קדש), and that they therefore, according to verse 30b, shall not eat meat of animals torn by beasts (טרפה).

In Deut 14:21-23, these elements reappear, although in slightly different formulations and in reverse order: According to verse 21aa, the Israelites are forbidden to eat carcasses (גבלה), because they are a holy people (עם קדוש, verse 21ab). They shall not eat a sucking goat (verse 21b). Verses 22-23 continue that the Israelites shall consume the tithe as well as the firstborn at the temple.

The correspondence between Exod 22:30b (טרפה) and Deut 14:21aa (גבלה) has already been observed,<sup>39</sup> and the same applies of course for the correspondence between Exod 22:30a (אנשי קדש) and Deut 14:21ab (עם קדוש).<sup>40</sup> A further correspondence obviously exists between the regulation that the firstborn shall be given to YHWH (Exod 22:29a) and the regulation that the first-

<sup>39</sup> See Weinfeld, p. 289. The term טרפה does not appear in Deuteronomy, on the one hand, while the term גבלה does not appear in the Book of the Covenant, on the other.

<sup>40</sup> Weinfeld, pp. 227-228.

born shall be consumed at the temple (Deut 14:23). The latter is interwoven with the regulation that the tithe shall be consumed at the temple (Deut 14:22-23), the concept of Deuteronomy that both firstborn and tithe are to be consumed at the temple most probably being the reason that the two have been joined.

On account of these chiasmic correspondences, there is a clear parallel between Exod 22:29b, speaking about an eight day old kid, and Deut 14:21b, dealing with גדי בחלב אמו, too. Most obviously, therefore, the authors/redactors of Deuteronomy understood גדי בחלב אמו as relating to the age of the kid, i.e. a “sucking kid”. Thus, it not only seems very probable that גדי בחלב אמו referred from the outset to a “sucking kid”, but additionally the “inverted quotation” of Exod 22:28-30 in Deut 14:21-23 shows that at least the authors of Deuteronomy understood the phrase that way.

Apart from its three appearances in the Pentateuch, the prohibition of the “sucking kid” most probably left its traces in the Book of Amos, too. In Amos 6:3-4, the prophet says to “those who are at ease in Zion, and [...] those who feel secure on Mount Samaria” (v. 1) as follows:

O you who put far off the day of doom, who cause the seat of violence to come near; Who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock (כרים מצאן) and calves from the midst of the “binding” (ועגלים מתוך מרבק) (Amos 6:3-4)

In this passage, especially the understanding of the rare word מְרַבֵּק is problematic, although the meaning of the root רבַק “to bind” seems safe.<sup>41</sup> On this basis, it was suggested that מרבק should be understood as “place of binding”, i.e. a place where calves were kept, and hence a “stall”.<sup>42</sup> Since this happened in order to fatten these calves, some scholars deduced the abstract meaning “fattening”.<sup>43</sup> It should be noted, however, that this understanding is based mainly on etymological considerations, which by their very nature can only provide a rather general impression of the meaning a given word has. Therefore, the alternative suggestion of Helga Weippert, aiming at a specific understanding of מרבק, seems to be favourable: Weippert convincingly demonstrated, on account of philological and iconographical observations, that

<sup>41</sup> Compare Arabic *rabaqa* “bind”.

<sup>42</sup> Einheitsübersetzung (1980); New King James Version (1982), New Revised Standard Version (1989).

<sup>43</sup> *KBL*<sup>3</sup>, *ad loc.*

מרבק should rather be understood as the binding of sucking calves to the feet of their mother.<sup>44</sup>

Understanding מרבק according to Weippert's suggestion implies that the kids Amos refers to were still bound to the feet of their mothers, i.e. they were sucking, and the prophet therefore seems to criticize that these "sucking kids" are prepared for food, providing an early attestation for the prohibition of the "kid at the milk of its mother".

It has been demonstrated, therefore, that the understanding of the famous saying "You shall not boil a young goat which is at its mother's milk" avoids the different problems of earlier explanations and is entirely coherent with the text-historical, grammatical, literary and literary-historical evidence. Thus, unlike other explanations, the present suggestion provides a sound basis for the contextualization of this saying within the religious and social history of Ancient Israel.

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<sup>44</sup> See H. Weippert, "Amos: Seine Bilder und ihr Milieu", in H. Weippert/K. Seybold/M. Weippert, *Beiträge zur prophetischen Bildsprache in Israel und Assyrien* (OBO 64; Fribourg/Göttingen, 1985), pp. 7-9. This suggestion gets further support from both Rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic, where מרבק/רבקה means "threshing team", i.e. a pair of two cattle bound together, see M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (London/New York, 1903), p. 1446 *ad loc.* Syriac *rābāqtā* "threshing" is a secondary meaning, which developed on this basis, compare C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Halle, 1928), p. 710.

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