Atonement in the Prayer of Azariah (Dan 3:40)

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1. Some Introductory Remarks on Azariah's Prayer

The additions to the Hebrew text of Daniel 3 in the ancient versions are not mere decoration and entertainment. They formulate their own theological messages. The hymn of the three young men in the furnace praises God's creation in a very wide perspective, covering the whole cosmos. The prayer of Azariah is one of the few pre-Christian texts that speaks about the death of righteous human beings for the benefit of atonement for the sins of the people—a motif which became decisive for New Testament Christology.[1] This paper focuses on the key verse of this motif, Dan 3:40. After a comparison of the versions, I suggest some new solutions for the understanding of the Greek texts.

Transmission of the Text (Ar, G, Th)

The two Greek texts of the Prayer of Azariah (PrA; Dan 3:26-45), the Septuagint (G) and the so-called Theodotion (Th), are very close to each

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[1] See KOCH, Daniel, 314; KOCH, Märtyrertod, 66. Koch underscores that the Prayer of Azariah was not formulated for its present context, but rather it was an independent poem without relationship to the Daniel traditions; see also MOORE, Additions, 41; KOTTSIEPER, Zusätze zu Ester und Daniel, 231; COLLINS, Daniel, 198: "it is also conceivable that the Prayer was traditionally associated with someone named Azariah and was inserted in the Book of Daniel because of the coincidence in name." Against this position, HAAG, Sühnopfer, 217, assumes that the Prayer was written intentionally as an expansion of the proto-canonical chapter 3 of the book of Daniel. He follows MITTMANN-RICHERT, Einführung, 132-133. She demonstrates that the cautious development of atonement through human self-sacrifice is a plausible result of the search for the meaning of martyrdom which is so dominant in the canonical book of Daniel.

other. One can assume that they go back to the same Greek translation.[2]
There is one exception, however. In Dan 3:40, the Greek texts differ
considerably (see below).

The "Theodotion" version does not stem from the second century
C.E. like the recension of the Septuagint by "Theodotion" (often named
θ' or Θ): The Greek text of Daniel represented in most of the Greek ma-
nuscripts has no relationship with the other Theodotion material of the
Old Testament but is rather an anonymous translation dating to pre-
Christian times, since it is quoted several times in the New Testament.
Nevertheless the usual siglum Th or θ' is retained here, although one
must keep in mind that it is a proto-Theodotion text (prTh).[3]

The Greek contains several Semitisms, which have prompted scho-
lars to hypothesize a Hebrew or Aramaic original.[4] Curt Kuhl (1930)
provided a retranslation from the Greek into Hebrew.[5] But due to his
attempt to construct a perfect Hebrew meter, he had to go far beyond a
word-for-word equivalent translation and use many text-critical emen-
dations. Klaus Koch (1987; 2005) points to an Aramaic version (Ar),
which Moses Gaster found in a medieval manuscript and published in
1894/1895.[6] The "Book of Memoirs" of the Rabbi Eleazar ben Asher (ca.
1325) contains a World Chronicle ascribed to Jerahmeel (11th/12th centu-
ry), which was written in Hebrew but also contains an Aramaic version
of the additions to Daniel 3. This Aramaic version was not written by
Jerahmeel, but it is a fragment from an earlier source. Gaster was con-
vinced that he had found the Aramaic original of Dan 3:26-90. Howe-
ver, the Aramaic represents a form of middle-Aramaic (corresponding
to the Targumim of Onkelos and Jonathan). Koch tries to show in a
detailed verse-by-verse analysis that the Jerahmeel-Fragment (Ar) re-
presents an overgrown stage of the Aramaic original that was later

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2   See KOCH, Deuterokanonische Zusätze, 2: 37; SWART, Divergences, 118. For details
     about the manuscript evidence of the Greek versions of Daniel 3, see especially
     BOGAERT, Daniel 3, 27-37.

3   See KOCH, Deuterokanonische Zusätze, 1: 13; SCHMITT, Stammt, 112/390; SCHMITT,
     Theodotionproblem, 9-10. On the relationship between the two Greek versions see
     also SCHÜPPHAUS, Verhältnis, 69. He opts for a priority of the Septuagint against the
     Theodotion version which he sees as an extensive re-editing of style and content of
     the LXX text (p. 71). SCHMITT, Theodotionproblem, 28-29, corroborates this assump-
     tion. See now also TILLY, Rezeption, 32-40.

4   One has to be careful with the term "Semitisms," since many linguistic phenomena
     which seem to be due to a Semitic influence occur in regular Koine Greek as well, see
     REISER, Sprache und literarische Formen, 33-48.

5   KUHL, Die drei Männer.

6   GASTER, The Unknown Aramaic Original.

adapted to the Aramaic of the Targumim.[7] For Koch, the (corrected) Aramaic text is the original and the starting point for the history of the textual transmission of the Prayer of Azariah. Koch's German translation in his commentary of 2005 ("Biblischer Kommentar") is obviously based on the Aramaic text. The question whether there is a Hebrew original behind both the Aramaic and the Greek, as, e.g., John Collins assumes,[8] must be left open here. For the point pursued in this paper, it is not even necessary to presuppose an Aramaic original.

Structure

The Prayer of Azariah is clearly structured and shows a concise composition. There are five sections consisting of six lines with bi- and tricola. The sixth strophe is shorter. One can summarize the structure in the following outline[9]:

26-28   Hymnic praise of the eternal God of the Fathers: God judges in justice and truth.

29-32   Confession of sin (collectively): God has every right to punish his people.

33-36   General appeal for help and mercy: God may keep his promises of old and uphold the covenant.[10]

37-38   Communal lament about the lack of leadership and of a sanctuary: There is no way to communicate with God through the cult.

39-41   Individual plea for acceptance: God may accept the death of the righteous men as a valid sacrifice in order to make atonement for the sins of the people.

42-45   Final plea for deliverance of the righteous and punishment of the enemies: God may save the righteous ones and strip the enemies of their power.

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7   KOCH, Deuterokanonische Zusätze; KOCH, Daniel, 317; KOCH/RÖSEL, Polyglotten-synopse, 314-315. See also HAAG, Sühnopfer, 197.

8   COLLINS, Daniel, 199, 202; see also MOORE, Additions, 45-46.

9   See KOCH, Daniel, 332-333; KOCH, Deuterokanonische Zusätze, 2: 36. COLLINS, Daniel, 198, presents a similar outline. For a different outline including the narrative framework, see HAAG, Sühnopfer, 199.

10   The significant term for "covenant" occurs only in the Greek texts (διαθήκη); see HAAG, Sühnopfer, 205.

Genre

Although the structure outlined above shows several characteristic features of the communal lament, the dominance of the collective confession of sin points to the post-exilic variation of this genre, the penitential prayer.[11] Koch notes a post-exilic change regarding the mood of the communal lament. The post-exilic prayers do not only complain about political distress and Yahweh's abandonment of his people, but these texts also describe the reason in a confession of sin. The penitential prayers confess a collective context of guilt accumulated from generation to generation. They are a reflection of the critique of the prophets who announced an inexorable deterioration of cult and nation due to social injustice and cultic carelessness. However, the penitential prayers do not formulate prophetic social criticism, but they point to the lack of obedience to the Torah: "We have not obeyed your commandments" (Dan 3:30). The prayers are characterized by an undifferentiated sense of guilt covering all epochs of time and the whole community of the people. This can be illustrated by the narrative frame of the Prayer of Azariah. The three men are thrown into the furnace because they are righteous, obey the commandments of the Lord and refuse to trespass against the covenant, and yet they confess that they came into this miserable situation due to "our (i.e., the people's) sins" (Dan 3:28).[12] Other examples of the genre "post-exilic penitential prayer" that go in the same direction are Ezra 9:1-10:6; Neh 1:1-11; Neh 9:1-10:40, and later Dan 9:1-27 (see also Psalm 106).[13]

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11 See BAUTCH, Developments; HAAG, Sühnopfer, 200-201: "nachexilisches Umkehrbekenntnis"; KOCH, Daniel, 330-331.

12 See TILLY, Rezeption, 45.

13 Concerning the genre of the narrative frame, one probably will find a close analogy in 2 Maccabees 7; however, as COLLINS, Daniel, 192, correctly points out, Daniel 3 is not yet a martyr legend: "The heroes do not die. Daniel 3 (and 6) is rather a forerunner of the martyr legend." See also LEBRAM, Jüdische Martyrologie, 91, 115. St. Augustine compared in his sermons the *tres pueri* (the three young men of Daniel 3) with the *Machabaei* (the seven Maccabees of 2 Macc 7); see BROWN TKACZ, The Seven Maccabees, 59-78. As the essence of his comparison, Augustine formulates in a sermon which was discovered at Mayence several years ago (Mainz, Stadtbibliothek I 9; named "Mayence 50" and dated to August 397): *illos ergo aperte liberavit, illos occulte coronavit*—God deliberately saved the three young men publicly, while God gave the crown of martyrdom to the seven sons of 2 Macc 7. But God handed neither of them over to death, i.e., the second and eternal death, says Augustine, explaining thus Ps 117:18LXX. In several other sermons, Augustine expresses the same thought in various formulations.

Time of Origin

Regarding the time of origin, the Prayer of Azariah gives a clear hint. The lack of leadership ("no prince, no prophet, no leader") and moreover the lack of a place for the correct celebration of the cult ("no burnt offering, no sacrifice, no oblation, no incense"; Dan 3:38) point to the time of the persecution of the Jewish religion by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes. During these years, i.e., 167 to 164 B.C.E., the temple in Jerusalem was profaned by the "desolating abomination" (see Dan 9:27; 1Macc 1:54). Hence, the Prayer of Azariah originated at about the same time when the Hebrew and Aramaic book of Daniel attained its final redaction.[14] However, whereas in the book of Daniel the desecration of the people and the sanctuary goes back to the ill will of the alien ruler, in the Prayer of Azariah the apostasy and the sins of the people are responsible for the devastating situation.

2. The Key Verse Dan 3:40

Although the Prayer of Azariah has much in common with the post-exilic penitential prayers of Ezra-Nehemiah, one thing is unique to this text[15]: the idea that the brutal execution of the martyrs[16] may stand for burnt offerings of rams and bulls and thousands of fattened lambs and that God may accept this as a valid sacrifice, as an atonement for the sins of the people. The context states that due to the profanation of the temple there is no proper place, and hence no possibility, to make sacrifices to the Lord in order to expiate for the sins of the people and to gain divine mercy and forgiveness. Thus the people cannot communicate with God, and this aggravates the distressing situation enormously.[17] From this viewpoint the next solution would be quite naturally that the death of the righteous men (the martyrs), the contrite soul (or: life, Aramaic נפשא, *nafšā'*; Greek ψυχή) and the spirit of humility (see

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14 See COLLINS, Daniel, 203; GILBERT, La prière, 572; BOGAERT, Daniel 3, 27; SCHENKER, Sacrifice, 351-356; KOCH, Daniel, 330; MITTMANN-RICHERT, Einführung, 117; KOTTSIEPER, Daniel, 232; TILLY, Rezeption, 45. HAAG, Sühnopfer, 206-207, 217, assumes that the prayer originated after the re-consecration of the temple, i.e., as a reflection about the time of the persecution of the Jewish religion. However, it is difficult to read Dan 3:38 (no leader, no prophet etc.) as a mere "reflection" and not as an expression of the current situation in which the prayer was written.

15 KOCH, Daniel, 333: "Ein solcher Abschnitt fehlt in anderen Beispielen der Gattung."

16 For the problematic term "martyrdom" see KOCH, Märtyrertod, 68.

17 See KOCH, Deuterokanonische Zusätze, 2: 54; KOCH, Märtyrertod, 69, 72.

Psalm 51:18-21[18]) may replace the sacrifices of animals, which were no longer possible. The praying people (Azariah and his friends) dare to offer themselves as a substitute for the sacrifices in order to gain God's mercy and forgiveness, in order to find God's favor and pleasure. This idea is expressed in Dan 3:40, and hence here lies the key verse of this prayer. This conclusion is corroborated by the fact that here all extant versions differ considerably. The following suggestions try to shed some light on the problematic passage.

Comparison of the Versions

The following synoptic chart displays the Aramaic version as reconstructed by Klaus Koch from the text of Jerahmeel (Ar), the Septuagint version (G) and the so-called Theodotion (Th) or better proto-Theodotion (prTh).[19] The English translation of the Greek texts is preliminary and follows the proposals in the commentaries; it demonstrates that the text is incomprehensible at the first glance. Later on a suggestion will be offered about how one might understand (and hence translate) the Greek differently.

Ar	Dan 3:40G	Dan 3:40Th (= prTh)
כדון יהא דיבחא דילנא יומא דין	οὕτω γενέσθω ἡμῶν ἡ θυσία ἐνώπιόν σου σήμερον	οὕτως γενέσθω θυσία ἡμῶν ἐνώπιόν σου σήμερον
לרעוא מן קדמך	καὶ ἐξιλάσαι ὄπισθέν σου	καὶ ἐκτελέσαι ὄπισθέν σου
דהא לא יתכלמון כל	ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν αἰσχύνη τοῖς πεποιθόσιν	ὅτι οὐκ ἔσται αἰσχύνη τοῖς πεποιθόσιν
די מהודין לך	ἐπὶ σοί καὶ τελειῶσαι ὄπισθέν σου	ἐπὶ σοί
thus the slaughtering of us at this day	Thus may our sacrifice	Thus may our sacrifice
	be before you today and make atonement behind you.	be before you today and [be?] complete after you.
may find favor before you,		

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18 See HAAG, Sühnopfer, 207; COLLINS, Daniel, 201.
19 For a similar chart (LXX, Vulgate, Ar—identified as Ms. Bod. Oxf. heb.d.11) see BEYERLE, Gottesvorstellungen, 169-170.

so that all	For there is no shame	For there will be no
who confess you	for those	shame for those
will not come to naught.[20]	who trust in you,	who trust in you.
	and complete after	
	you.	

The Basic Idea behind Dan 3:40

The Aramaic text is clear and understandable. The men declare their impending death as a "slaughtering" (ריבחא, dibḥā'). The Aramaic term indicates an execution outside the cult, i.e., it points to martyrdom (the term for cultic sacrifice would be נכסתא, nikseṭā').[21] The following formulation, however, clearly employs cultic language, since the line "may find favor before you" is the technical term for the acceptance of sacrifices[22] – e.g., Lev 1:3-4: "If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you shall offer a male without blemish; you shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, for acceptance in your behalf before the LORD. You shall lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be acceptable in your behalf as atonement for you" (NRSV). These verses from Leviticus formulate the basic idea of the burnt offering of an animal as a means to express a successful communication with God, to find favor and atonement before God. Since cultic sacrifices of animals are no longer possible, the basic idea is transferred to martyrdom.[23] God will regard the impending death of the executed men as a valid sacrifice in order to make atonement on behalf of the people.[24]

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20 See the German translation by KOCH, Daniel, 321: „... so werde die Schlachtung von uns an diesem Tag zum Wohlgefallen vor dir, damit nicht zuschanden werden alle, die dich bekennen."

21 See KOCH, Deuterokanonische Zusätze, 2: 55; KOCH, Märtyrertod, 73-74.

22 See COLLINS, Daniel, 202; KOCH, Daniel, 321. The Vulgate renders *ut placeat tibi* and seems close to Ar, but it is not the source for Ar, since in all other places there is no close relationship between Vulgate and Ar.

23 See SCHENKER, Sacrifice, 354.

24 HAAG, Sühnopfer, 209, suggests a somewhat different interpretation. He sees the basic point not in the concept of atonement for the sins of the people but rather in a personalization of the idea of sacrifice. The righteous men understand their devotion to their belief wholeheartedly, which as a final consequence includes their willingness to die for their belief. BEYERLE, Gottesvorstellungen, 177-178, questions the idea of atonement in this context, because he regards the object of the sacrifice as disputed. Is it the life of the praying men, as most commentators say or is it the prayer itself that makes atonement? For the second suggestion, Beyerle points to HENGEL, The Atonement, 61. However, Hengel formulates the argument cautiously: "In the original version of the penitential prayer, the atoning sacrifice may have re-

When the prayer continues in the next section with the plea for deliverance, the basic idea is not questioned. It is not the actual performance of the sacrifice (i.e., the killing) that counts, but the readiness of the men to offer up their lives and their willing consent to do so. Thus, there is still the possibility for God to deliver them from imminent death. This situation corresponds to the interpretation of the Binding (*Aqedā*) of Isaac (Genesis 22) in Early Jewish tradition, which emphasizes Isaac's willing consent. Philo of Alexandria noted that even though the sacrifice was not carried out, it was regarded as complete and perfect.[25] The Palestinian Targumim regard the *Aqedā* as an atoning act equivalent to every real sacrifice. Isaac's willingness to be sacrificed has such a permanent effect that all subsequent sacrifices in Israel are only a remembrance of this primeval event in the land Moriah. The *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (Pseudo-Philo, ca. 100 C.E.) sees the Binding of Isaac as a burnt offering which was acceptable before the Lord (*acceptabilis*; LAB 18:5). Even though Isaac did not actually die, the tradition regards him as one who has laid his ashes on the altar.[26] Hence, the basic idea of the Prayer of Azariah (Dan 3:40) is not without analogy. The readiness of human beings to sacrifice their own lives for others is equivalent to the actual death and the sacrifices at the temple.[27]

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ferred to the prayer itself, but in the mouths of the three men in the burning fiery furnace, i.e. according to the LXX version, the martyrdom of the three men becomes an atoning sacrifice offered to God. According to Dan. 3.28 'they offered up their bodies' so as not to be able to venerate any god other than the God of Israel ... Here we have the earliest account of a martyrdom, from pre-Maccabean Judaism, which, however, ends with the miracle of God's deliverance. For later rabbinic tradition, despite their miraculous deliverance, the three become prototypes of the pious martyr." As it will be pointed out below, the cultic language and the proximity to the concepts in Exodus and Leviticus make a spiritualized notion as the original intention less plausible.

25 Philo, *De Abrahamo*, 177; see COLLINS, Daniel, 201.

26 See, e.g., *jTa'anit* 2:1 (according to KUNDERT, Opferung, 32). Other traditions assume that Isaac was actually sacrificed, e.g., *bZevahim* 62a: Isaac's ashes (or the ashes of the substitute ram?) indicate the place for the temple (see KUNDERT, Opferung, 43); or *bBerakhot* 62b: Isaac's ashes remember God of the promises for Abraham in Genesis 22 and protect Israel against the Angel that destroyed the people (*ibid.*, 45-49).

27 See KOCH, Märtyrertod, 76. There is a Christian reception of these verses (Dan 3:39-40) and hence of the idea of martyrdom in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14:1-2; see BAUMEISTER, Anfänge, 298. Both texts have a cluster of six terms in common. "By weaving a cluster of phrases from Azariah's Prayer into the account of Polycarp's execution, the author of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* was probably hinting at an analogy of fate between Polycarp and Daniel's companions. ... The analogy underlines Polycarp's post-mortem vindication, by the resurrection of body and soul. ... The analogy is strengthened by details and phrases in chapter 15, indicating that Polycarp's body could not be burned, which are reminiscent of the three men's rescue in

Suggestions for the Problematic Terms in the Greek Versions

Did the Greek versions employ this basic idea? The commentaries usually regard the Greek texts as hopelessly corrupt: "Scholarly discussions of this obviously corrupt clause have produced much heat but little light," says Carey A. Moore, quoted by Klaus Koch with approval.[28] This is reason enough to add another guess, another suggestion to make sense of the Greek text(s). The three problematic terms are ἐξιλάσαι in G versus ἐκτελέσαι in prTh, the preposition phrase ὄπισθέν σου in both versions, and τελειώσαι in G.

(1) ἐξιλάσαι. This verb is normally constructed with περί, in rare cases with the accusative, and once with ὑπέρ (Ezek 45:17). It is the standard equivalent for the Hebrew root כפר, kipper (to make atonement, to purge) which clearly points to a cultic context. The basic meaning of kipper, however, can be derived from Gen 32:21. Jacob says before the meeting with his brother Esau: "I may appease him (achieve reconciliation; אֲכַפְּרָה פָנָיו; ἐξιλάσομαι τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ) with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterwards I shall see his face; perhaps he will accept me." Hence, kipper is an activity to gain one's favor without any warranty or expectation that the addressed person will in fact answer favorably. The basic idea about the burnt offering quoted above (Lev 1:3-4) also uses kipper in order to describe the purpose of the offering: "to make atonement for him," i.e., "in order to achieve reconciliation for him" (לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו; ἐξιλάσασθαι περὶ αὐτοῦ). So if the Aramaic original already used the language of Lev 1:3-4, the Greek translation might also point to these verses, but instead of using the concept of God's favor (Hebrew רָצוֹן; Aramaic לרעוא, l'ra'awā'), G uses the other characteristic term for atonement: ἐξιλάσκομαι, kipper. This makes perfect sense. The sacrifice of the praying human beings shall make atonement, achieve reconciliation.

The idea of non-cultic atonement can also be found in Ben Sira: ὁ τιμῶν πατέρα ἐξιλάσκεται ἁμαρτίας ("Those who honor their father atone for sins"; Sir 3:3); or: πῦρ φλογιζόμενον ἀποσβέσει ὕδωρ καὶ ἐλεημοσύνη ἐξιλάσεται ἁμαρτίας ("As water extinguishes a blazing fire, so almsgiving atones for sin"; Sir 3:30). Thus the concept to transform the basic idea of atonement by animal sacrifices to an interpretation of the ritual without bloodshed that is still efficacious (but in a different manner)

Dan 3:46-50LXX/Th." VAN HENTEN, Daniel 3 and 6, 157-158. One must also point to Wisdom 3:6: God tried the righteous as gold in the furnace and received them as a burnt offering (ὡς ὁλοκάρπωμα θυσίας); see SCHENKER, Sacrifice, 351-353.

[28] See MOORE, Daniel, 59; KOCH, Märtyrertod, 74; BEYERLE, Gottesvorstellungen, 177.

begins to become established.[29] However, Ben Sira also knows the process of ritual atonement as an important task of the priests (Sir 45:16; 45:23), while the Book of Leviticus itself already is familiar with a substitution for the blood of an animal. According to Lev 5:11-13, poor people who cannot afford an animal (not even a pair of doves) may bring one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour instead, and this offering will be fully accepted as a valid purification offering.

(2) The next problematic wording is the prepositional phrase ὄπισθέν σου: ... make atonement – behind you/after you?[30] There are several suggestions for emendation: (a) The easiest one is to assume a misspelling: ὄπισθέν σου should read ἔμπροσθεν σου, before you.[31] (b) Another idea would be to correct the text according to Mal 1:9: καὶ νῦν ἐξιλάσκεσθε τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ θεοῦ ὑμῶν καὶ δεήθητε αὐτοῦ ... And now entreat the face of your God, and make supplication to him ... (c) The prTh version (ἐκτελέσαι ὄπισθέν σου) "sounds very much like a very literal Greek rendering of the Hebrew idiom mallē' 'aḥareykā, 'to wholly follow you' (cf., for example, Num 14:24; Deut 1:36; Josh 14:8); unfortunately, however, our Greek verb ekteleō is never used in the LXX to render this Hebrew phrase."[32]

Instead of an emendation, one may suggest serious consideration of the idea of approaching God "from behind." The Prayer of Azariah is dominated by the confession of sin; the overall feeling of the praying people is humble and low. Because of their sin and because of the lack of a proper place to sacrifice for atonement, they do not dare to approach God face to face. Without proper cultic provisions (see Leviticus 16), it is lethal for human beings to approach God directly (see, e.g., the story of poor Uzzah in 2Sam 6:6-8). Hence, the idea behind ὄπισθέν σου might be that one approaches God "from behind," because the atonement via the self-sacrifice of the martyrs was so unusual.[33] This concept

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29   This holds also true for the Qumran literature; see, e.g., 4Q174 frg. 1-3 col. i: „And he [God] commanded to build for himself a temple of man, to offer him in it, before him, the works of thanksgiving."

30   KOCH, Märtyrertod, 74: "wobei ὄπισθέν σου noch niemand erklären konnte." See also KOCH, Deuterokanonische Zusätze, 1: 88; 2: 56; SCHMITT, Theodotionproblem, 22, n. 93.

31   See KOCH, Deuterokanonische Zusätze, 2: 56; KOCH, Daniel, 321.

32   MOORE, Additions, 59. See also GILBERT, La prière d'Azarias, 573. Gilbert translates prTh as follows: "que tel puisse être notre sacrifice devant toi aujourd'hui et pleinement te suivre..." (p. 562) and assumes a reference to Caleb, "who has followed Yahweh wholeheartedly" (Num 14,24; Deut 1,36; Jos 14,8-9.14).

33   See also MITTMANN-RICHERT, Einführung, 132: Die durch das Opfer gewirkte Versöhnung „hinter Gott" „zeugt davon, daß man sich der Neuartigkeit, ja, eigentlich

resembles the way in which Moses approaches the glory of God in E-xod 33:23. He is hidden in a cleft of the rock while the glory of God passes by; καὶ ἀφελῶ τὴν χεῖρα καὶ τότε ὄψῃ τὰ ὀπίσω μου [יְהָא־תֶא] τὸ δὲ πρόσωπόν μου οὐκ ὀφθήσεταί σοι. "And I will remove my hand, and then shall you see my back parts; but my face shall not appear to you." This meeting between God and Moses is a very extraordinary one, and it happens after the great sin of the people with the Golden Calf. Unlike the meeting at the burning bush in Exod 3-4, Moses here cannot com-municate directly with God "face to face" — probably due to the deteri-oration of the relationship between God and the people of Israel becau-se of the great sin. This constellation also matches the Prayer of Azariah. The text confesses the great sin of the people, and hence it is not possible to face God directly in the sanctuary. The humble sacrifice of the martyrs might be a way to come close to God "from behind." This attitude also suits the next verse (Dan 3:41), in which the prayer explicitly states that "we seek your face" (ζητοῦμεν τὸ πρόσωπόν σου). The phrase implies that normal contact with God's face (like in the usual ritual at the sanctuary) is not possible (due to the historical situa-tion and the great sins of the people). The terms ὄπισθεν (Dan 3:40) and ὀπίσω (Exod 33:23) are conventional translations of the Hebrew רחא.

(3) The third problem is the additional phrase in G, καὶ τελειῶσαι ὄπισθέν σου. Usually it is regarded as corrupt and hence not translated.[34] Has it something to do with the prTh version (ἐκτελέσαι ὄπισθέν σου)? If one looks at the concordance, another possibility comes to mind: The verb τελειόω is used together with τὰς χεῖρας as the verbatim translation of the Hebrew idiom ד אלמ, "fill the hand(s) (of somebody)," which is the technical expression for consecrating (ordaining) a priest. The clas-sic passage, Exod 29:9, reads: καὶ ζώσεις αὐτοὺς ταῖς ζώναις καὶ περιθήσεις αὐτοῖς τὰς κιδάρεις καὶ ἔσται αὐτοῖς ἱερατεία ἐμοὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα καὶ τελειώσεις τὰς χεῖρας Ααρων [יד־תא תאלמו] καὶ τὰς χεῖρας τῶν υἱῶν αὐτοῦ ("and you shall gird them with sashes and tie headdresses on them; and the priesthood shall be theirs by a perpetual ordinance. You shall then ordain Aaron and his sons"). It is the task of the consecrated priest to bring blood from the sacrificed bull into the sanctuary in order to achieve reconciliation (kipper): καὶ λαβὼν ὁ ἱερεὺς ὁ χριστὸς ὁ τετελειωμένος τὰς χεῖρας ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ μόσχου καὶ εἰσοίσει αὐτὸ ἐπὶ τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ μαρτυρίου ("The anointed priest, who has had his hands

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der Unmöglichkeit einer menschlich dargebotenen Sühneleistung unabhängig vom Tempel als der gottgegebenen Sühnestätte bewußt war."

[34] See SCHMITT, Theodotionproblem, 22, n. 93: Ms 88 and Syh put these words between obelos and metobelos.

validated, shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting"; Lev 4:5).

The idea of consecrating priests would fit very well in the cultic context of Dan 3:40. If the martyrdom of the righteous men stands for a sacrifice, a priest who offers the sacrifice is still missing. Maybe the Prayer of Azariah adds to the idea of atonement the concept of consecration of priests. The willingness of the men does not only make them fit for a valid sacrifice, but it also consecrates them as priests. However, since this concept sounds very bold, it is expressed only fragmentarily: The mentioning of the hands is missing, and they again do not approach God face-to-face, but "from behind." The phrase καὶ τελειῶσαι ὄπισθέν σου could also stand for the completion and ending of the liturgical service, which is in mind here. A similar wording is used in Ben Sira at the end of the praise of the high priest Simon son of Onias: καὶ ἐδεήθη ὁ λαὸς κυρίου ὑψίστου ἐν προσευχῇ κατέναντι ἐλεήμονος ἕως συντελεσθῇ κόσμος κυρίου καὶ τὴν λειτουργίαν αὐτοῦ ἐτελείωσαν ("And the people of the Lord Most High offered their prayers before the Merciful One, until the order of worship of the Lord was ended, and they completed his ritual"; Sir 50:19). However, the verbal form in Dan 3:40G (third person singular active), which needs a singular subject, does not fit into the concept of "ending (a ceremony)." (For a full translation or paraphrase of Dan 3:40G see the conclusion.)

Ulrike Mittmann-Richert underscores that the two problematic occurrences of ὄπισθέν σου, i.e., the atonement "behind God/after God," indicate that the writer was well aware of the fact that atonement by human self-sacrifice independently of the temple as God's chosen place for reconciliation is something impossible. Therefore the human work is placed behind or after the divine will for atonement, forgiveness and reconciliation. But nevertheless, this interpretation also confirms that the basic idea behind Dan 3:40G consists of a real self-sacrifice of human beings as an extraordinary substitute for the animal sacrifice: "Die ungewöhnlich starke Betonung der Vorordnung des göttlichen Versöhnungswillens vor die menschliche Sühneleistung ist ein deutliches Indiz dafür, daß die dingliche, auf die menschliche Lebenshingabe zielende Opfervorstellung den ursprünglichen Textsinn bezeichnet und nicht die spiritualisierte." [35]

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[35] See MITTMANN-RICHERT, Einführung, 132. HAAG, Sühnopfer, 211, follows Mittmann-Richert's interpretation of ὄπισθέν σου. He reads the phrase in regard of time: "after you" or "following you." The sacrifice of the righteous men *follows* the atonement which was already made by God in the revelation of God's plan for history; with their sacrifice they want to achieve the *completion* of God's eschatological plan.

Hypotheses about the Origin of the Greek Text(s)

The possible origin of the different versions may be reconstructed hypothetically as follows: There is no proof of whether the original text was written in Hebrew, in Aramaic, or in Greek, although there is some probability that the Greek goes back to a Semitic *Vorlage*. The only extant Semitic version is the Aramaic text of Jerahmeel, and Koch assumes that the corrected Aramaic version (Ar) is the oldest stage of all extant variations. However, in this case he reverses the usual text-critical argument of the *lectio difficilior*, since the Aramaic text of his reconstruction is much easier to understand than the Greek text(s).

(1) The basic idea of the text links with the Torah and its concept of sacrifice, but since there is no proper place for a sacrifice of animals, the martyrdom of the righteous men takes the place of these sacrifices and makes atonement in order to gain God's favor.

(2) The Greek text (or: translation) (Gr* as the basis for both G and prTh) did not use the idea of "God's favor," but rather the concept of atonement: ἐξιλάσκομαι "achieve reconciliation" as technical term for Hebrew כפר, *kipper*. While the Aramaic text mentions a "slaughtering" (דיבחא, *dibḥā'*), the Greek calls it a ritual sacrifice (ἡ θυσία). Maybe already at this stage the idea of consecrating the men as priests through their martyrdom (τελειῶσαι [τὰς χεῖρας]) was added (alternatively the Septuagint version [G] added it). By analogy to Moses' meeting with God after the great sin of the Golden Calf in Exod 33:23, they approach God not from the front, but from behind—the martyrs' sacrifice makes atonement ὄπισθέν σου.

(3) The Septuagint (G) preserved the Old Greek (Gr*), but for proto-Theodotion (prTh) the idea of atonement through martyrdom was too difficult or simply not understandable. Hence, the text was paraphrased differently, perhaps influenced by the hardly understandable phrase τελειῶσαι ὄπισθέν σου and/or the Hebrew idiom *mallē' 'aḥareykā*, 'to wholly follow you' (see above). Thus, prTh introduces the concept of "perfection" or "completion," "and may we unreservedly follow you" (NRSV) or "and be complete after you".[36]

(4) The Syriac version omits the idea of atonement completely and doubles the following phrase: "and let not your servants be ashamed."[37]

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[36] MOORE, Additions, 55.

[37] See COLLINS, Daniel, 195-196; KOCH, Daniel, 321.

3. Conclusions

The Prayer of Azariah in its Aramaic and Greek versions (with ἐξιλάσαι; i.e., Dan 3:40G) promotes the idea that the self-sacrifice and martyrdom of the righteous men may function as a valid sacrifice in order to make atonement (achieve reconciliation; Hebrew *kipper*) before, or, as G says, "behind" God for all the sins of the people. The righteous men, sentenced to death, offer their life as atonement, since martyrdom transcends every conventional sacrifice. Thereby they try to receive God's favor for a happy future for all those who trust in God.[38]

The Greek versions are difficult to understand. The prTh version seems to spiritualize the idea of sacrifice and play down the concept of atonement. It speaks of a complete (or perfect?) sacrifice before the Lord. The Septuagint version (G) which is perhaps closer to the original Greek text (Gr*) employs terms which can be read as hidden allusions to cultic and ritual concepts of Exodus and Leviticus. If the reader dares to regard the problematic terms as "abbreviations" and to fill up the missing parts from the alluded passages, a very interesting message emerges. The result can be illustrated by the following paraphrasing translation:

Paraphrase (G < Gr*?)	Cultic/ritual allusions
Thus may our sacrifice be	
before you today	
and make atonement	כפר, kipper, from Leviticus, e.g., 1:3-4
behind you.	Exod 33:23
For there is no shame for those	
who trust in you.	
And it may fill (our hands)	Technical term of the consecration
(= consecrate us as priests)	of priests, see Exod 29:9 etc.
behind you.	Exod 33:23

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[38] See KOCH, Daniel, 375.

Thus this passage is one of the few witnesses (see also Isaiah 53[39]) of the idea of representative atonement in Jewish thought. The violent death of the martyrs becomes a substitute for the atonement sacrifice at the temple. Even if the sacrifice of the righteous men ultimately is not carried out, in the end they are saved through divine intervention, like Isaac in the *Aqedā*. Their willingness to offer up their lives for God's and the people's sake counts as a valid sacrifice to make atonement and achieve reconciliation (Hebrew *kipper*). One has to bear in mind that the ritual (be it the sacrifice of animals or the extraordinary martyrdom) is not the means to propitiate a monstrous God. God cannot be manipulated or forced, not even by martyrdom. Sacrifice and blood are the means given by God himself in order to help human beings to get rid of everything that disturbs or lethally interrupts the salvific communication between God and human. The sacrifice is the sacrament, the sign that indicates the restoration of the relationship with God.[40] It is an extraordinary idea that the death of righteous men can replace the sacrifice of animals; an idea forced by an extreme situation of political distress. Maybe this is one of the reasons why the Prayer of Azariah was not received into the Jewish canon. After the restoration of the temple (164 BCE) an extreme concept of sacrifice without animals was no longer necessary. And yet the idea became an essential topic in New Testament Christology.

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[39] SCHENKER, Sacrifice, 355, sees Isaiah 53, Dan 3:38-40, and Wisdom 3:6 on a line leading to the affirmation of a theology of martyrdom in the second and first century B.C.E., although there is no literary dependence between the three texts. See also HENGEL, Wirkungsgeschichte, 62.

[40] See KOCH, Märtyrertod, 77-80.

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