“HOW MANY VESSELS”?
AN EXAMINATION OF MT 1 SAM 2:14/4QSAM\(^a\) 1 SAM 2:16

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A literary unit comprising six verses details Eli’s sons’ practice (דְּשֵׁמָה) of seizing sacrificial meats through unconventional means (1 Sam 2:12-17). The author(s/redactors) enveloped the unit with parallel statements that serve to describe the sons’ standing with Yahweh — “The sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not Yahweh” (v. 12); “Therefore the young men’s sin was very great before Yahweh” (v. 17). The author does not name Eli’s sons in this pericope, but refers to them as “sons of Eli,” “sons of Belial,” and “young men.” A great deal of scribal activity is evident, as one may determine through an examination of the variant readings among the ancient witnesses. One peculiar reading lists four vessels (see MT 1 Sam 2:14) that were used to boil the sacrificial offerings. This reading is peculiar because such a list is quite uncommon in the Hebrew Bible, especially in a historical narrative where the author is sharing a sacred story.

In this paper I will first present the 4QSam\(^a\) version of 1 Sam 2:16 (compare MT 1 Sam 2:14-16) and document its eight variant readings both to provide a context as well as to demonstrate the great deal of scribal activity that is evident in this pericope.\(^1\) Afterwards I will focus on the list of vessels as found in chief witnesses — the Masoretic Text, 4QSam\(^a\), and the LXX — and will argue the following two main points:

Lists tend to inflate in the course of their transmission; for example,

4QSam\(^a\) with its two vessels is preferable to LXX\(^{BL}\) with three, or to the MT with four vessels.

The author likely recorded a single cooking pot in the primitive version of the narrative, not two, three, or four; the single vessel was סיר (a “large pot”). But a scribe in the MT tradition misread and wrote כור ("wash-basin") in its place.

4QSam\(^a\) 1 SAM 2:16 AND ITS VARIANTS

The transcriptions and reconstruction of 4QSam\(^a\) 1 Sam 2:16 read as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{תועה תאיש ז"זוח ז"זלח אל תמר הוכל וקרת בחוך הנען} \\
\text{כורה לוכ ממל אושר תאה נמש אוצר אל כ חור התו הלוחח} \\
\text{בחוך הבשלח דבש יכוה א 역시 ממל שלח משנש ברוק והוה} \\
\text{משר א ובפורות (פוקל אפר רעל המעוז לקו ואו [ ]} \\
\text{מטו מת ממל [ ]} \\
\end{align*}
\]

If the man answered and s[ai]d to the priest’s servant, “Let the priest burn the [fat] as usual,\(^2\) then take for yourself everything that your soul desires,” then he would say, “No, for you shall give it now, or [I will take] it by force as [the] flesh boils.” Taking a three-pronged fork [in his hand, he would thrust] into the large pot or pot and take everything the fork brought up. If [...] good alone [...] right.

Regrettably, due to destructive environmental forces,\(^3\) vv. 12-15 of the pericope are not attested in 4QSam\(^a\).\(^4\) Nevertheless, v. 16 of the scroll provides much information to the narrative, as may be seen from the following variants:

1) 4QSam\(^a\):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{תועה תאיש ז"זוח ז"זלח אל תמר הוכל} \\
\text{ייר全域旅游 ז"זוח ז"זלח} \\
\text{LXX: יאפר אליעי ואיש} \\
\end{align*}
\]


\(^3\) These forces include worm consumption (magnification of the leather reveals worm tracks along the outer edges of a number of fragments) and moisture. Notwithstanding the number of surviving fragments of 4QSam\(^a\), the leather is in a poor state of preservation. Embedded for two millennia under more than three feet of deposit, the once tan leather is now dark brown. At points, the text can be read only with infrared photographs and/or computer-enhanced digitized images.

\(^4\) Furthermore, none of the verses from the pericope under discussion are found in either 4QSam\(^b\) or 4QSam\(^c\).