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“Our Father Isaac”: Reading the Sahidic *Testament of Isaac*
in an Egyptian Monastic Context

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver

and the Iliff School of Theology

Joint PhD Program

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

John W. Fadden

June 2013

Advisor: Pamela M. Eisenbaum

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that the textual community of fourth or fifth century monastic Egypt read *Testament of Isaac* as an ascetical regimen in order to transform themselves into children of Isaac. *T. Isaac* highlights three particular dimensions of Isaac's character from the remembered tradition of Isaac that would have resonated in the Egyptian monastic context of the textual community – Isaac as priestly authority, Isaac as sacrifice, and Isaac as blind ascetic – to create a model for the new self that the textual community aimed to achieve. Two important ascetic practices in *T. Isaac* that the textual community was to perform were copying and reading *T. Isaac*. These two practices functioned as technologies of the self that helped the members of the textual community to transform their present subjectivity into a new self modeled on Isaac in *T. Isaac*.

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Introduction

An ancient pseudepigraphical text, *Testament of Isaac* (*T. Isaac*) recounts the death of Isaac the biblical patriarch. It is a relatively ignored text from antiquity. The general silence about *T. Isaac* in scholarship might suggest to someone that reading a dissertation on this text may be unfruitful. Yet, this silence should not be taken to mean that *T. Isaac* is uninteresting. As I first read *T. Isaac*, I was struck by how different the story of Isaac's death was from the paltry space given to Isaac's death in Genesis. Why, I wondered, does Isaac get portrayed in this manner? Eventually, to make sense of how Isaac is portrayed, I began to consider: How might *T. Isaac* have functioned for the textual community that read, copied, and apparently cherished it? These questions drove the project that has resulted in this dissertation. Such questions helped me to consider *T. Isaac* as evidence for an important period in early Christianity, Egyptian monasticism in the fourth and fifth centuries C.E.

0.1 Purpose of the Dissertation

In this dissertation, I am attempting to understand *T. Isaac* within an Egyptian monastic context. I argue that the textual community read *T. Isaac* as an ascetical regimen for realizing the true self. In doing so, the textual community drew on remembered traditions of Isaac that supported the idealizations of priestly /monastic holiness, of human obedience to God's commands, and of ascetic practice. Isaac became

a remembered example of the true self that one could hope to attain through ascetical practice.

I borrow the term “textual community” from Brian Stock. He defines it as a group that arises somewhere in the interstices between the imposition of the written word and the articulation of a certain type of social organization. It is an interpretive community, but it is also a social identity.¹

I use the phrase textual community to identify a community that preserves, uses, and reproduces a particular text. Such a community is an abstraction, an idealization, of real communities whose members may have applied the ideas of the text in their life. In the process of preserving, using, and reproducing the text, members of a textual community also interprets the text, and thus a textual community is an interpretive community as well. Not all textual communities read and interpret the same text in similar manners. It is not difficult to imagine, for example, that a textual community comprised of twenty first century, academically trained biblical scholars would engage a text in a different manner than members of a church bible study. Perhaps the former would concern themselves with historical criticism, while the latter would be primarily concerned with devotional purposes or gaining life-lessons out of the text. For the dissertation, when I refer to “the textual community” I have in mind one of *T. Isaac*’s textual communities, one that is made up of Egyptian Christian monastics in the fourth or fifth century C.E.

By “ascetical regimen,” I mean intentional and repetitive performances, which rely upon a remembered tradition, that help to bring about a change in one’s subjectivity. The subjectivity toward which one is moving is an alternative to (but not necessarily

¹ B. Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 150.

opposed to) the dominant subjectivity of one's culture.² In the monastic context, monks are moving from a worldly subjectivity to a subjectivity based on Isaac's model. I sometimes refer to it as a 'holy one' subjectivity. In ancient Christianity, the holy one is a figure who was viewed to have gained access to the divine. The holy one embodied the potential for being fully human, as God intended.³ Isaac exemplifies the image of a holy one. I will discuss the particular subjectivity that became manifest in this textual community in more detail later in the dissertation (Chapter Four).

The remembrance of a tradition is an important aspect of ascetical practice. According to Gavin Flood, "asceticism can be seen as an internalisation of tradition, the shaping of the narrative of a life in accordance with the narrative tradition that might be seen as the performance of the memory of tradition."⁴ Central to tradition is a shared collective memory passed through generations. Memory is to be understood as the capacity to conserve information deemed important by a community.⁵ Tradition is "actively reconstructed in a shared imagination and reconstituted in the present as memory."⁶ One of the ways that the performance of memory is accomplished is through the repetitive performance of religious reading: "Religious reading, the internalisation of

² Cf. R. Valantasis, *The Making of the Self: Ancient and Modern Asceticism* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2008).

³ P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *JRS* 61, (1971): 80-101; P. Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," *Representations* 2, (1983): 1-25.

⁴ G.D. Flood, *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory, and Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ix.

⁵ Flood, *The Ascetic Self*, 8.

⁶ Flood, *The Ascetic Self*, 8.

scripture, is crucial for the performance of the memory of tradition.”⁷ In the late example of Peter Damian (c.1007-1072), Flood abstracts, “The reading of scripture, the lives of the saints, homilies and so on becomes, along with prayer and liturgy, another way in which the body is entextualised.”⁸ As Flood theorizes the ascetic self across cultures, he places importance on ritual and texts. Texts become an icon of tradition that ritual articulates and performs.⁹ “The text makes demands upon the subject to conform to it.”¹⁰ For the textual community of *T. Isaac*, *T. Isaac* became an icon of the remembered tradition of Isaac.

The textual community recalled the remembered tradition of Isaac as preserved in *T. Isaac* to imagine a new self. I consider it “remembered tradition” precisely because the Isaac portrayed in *T. Isaac* drew on traditions we find in an array of Jewish and Christian literature from antiquity. Literary theorist Mieke Bal suggests, “legendary characters are expected to exhibit a certain stereotypical behaviour and set attributes; if the story were to depart too far from these set characteristics, they would no longer be recognizable,”¹¹ So while *T. Isaac* highlighted particular features of Isaac, the portrait of the patriarch is consonant with tradition and would therefore be in line with audience expectations. Part of this study is devoted to discussing the relevant traditions of Isaac that were circulating in antiquity with those in *T. Isaac*. Such a comparison allows me to see the features of

⁷ Flood, *The Ascetic Self*, 181.

⁸ Flood, *The Ascetic Self*, 193.

⁹ Flood, *The Ascetic Self*, 218.

¹⁰ Flood, *The Ascetic Self*, 220.

¹¹ M. Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 120.

Isaac that *T. Isaac* emphasized in continuity with and as an alternative to the traditions of Isaac in antiquity. These emphasized features of Isaac are important aspects of the remembered tradition that the textual community associated with *T. Isaac* drew upon to imagine the new self.

This dissertation departs from the ways previous scholarship has treated *T. Isaac*. Scholarship takes Isaac for granted in the narrative of *T. Isaac*. In addition, the textual community's monastic context and the use of the text in such a context are relatively unexplored areas of study.

One of the most daunting problems for stating the question for scholarship on *T. Isaac* is the paucity of previous research. Scholarship in *T. Isaac* has for the most part not advanced much since the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, when Montague R. James and others first publish comments.¹² The majority of scholarship on *T. Isaac* is found in introductions to the text or its translation, in dictionary or encyclopedia entries, and explorations into genre and the motifs of tours of hell.¹³ In these contexts, little space

¹² M.R. James, *The Testament of Abraham: The Greek Text Now First Edited with an Introduction and Notes; With an Appendix Containing Extracts from the Arabic Version of the Testaments of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob* by W.E. Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1892); I. Guidi, "Il testamento di Isaaco e il testamento di Giacobbe," *AAL(R)* 9, (1900); E. Andersson, "Isak's Vermachtnis aus dem koptischen ubersetzt," *Sphynx* 7, (1903); S. Gaselee, "Appendix Containing a Translation from the Coptic Version of the Testaments of Isaac and Jacob," in *The Testament of Abraham: Translated from the Greek Text with Introduction and Notes* (London: SPCK, 1927).

¹³ Introductions: James, *The Testament of Abraham*; Guidi, "Il testamento di Isaaco e il testamento di Giacobbe."; Gaselee, "Appendix Containing a Translation from the Coptic Version of the Testaments of Isaac and Jacob."; K.H. Kuhn, "The Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," *JTS* 8, (1957); K.H. Kuhn, "An English Translation of the Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," *JTS* 18, (1967); M. Delcor, *Le testament d'Abraham: Introduction, traduction du texte grec et commentaire de la recension grecque longue; Suivi de la traduction des testaments d'Abraham, d'Isaac et Jacob d'après les versions Orientales* (SVTP 2; eds. Denis and De Jonge; Leiden: Brill, 1973); W.F. Stinespring, "Testament of Isaac," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: The Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (ed. Charlesworth; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983); K.H. Kuhn, "The Testament of Isaac," in *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (ed. Sparks; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); G. Aranda Pérez, "Testament de Isaac," in *Apocrifos del Antiguo Testamento: Testamentos O Disursos de Adios* (ed. Diez Macho; Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1987).

is available for advancing claims about *T. Isaac*. The lack of space often results in truncated arguments that repeat the same superficial observations.

In general, scholars mention that *T. Isaac* either relied on Jewish traditions or is a Christian redaction of a Jewish original, or they tend to dismiss it as derivative of *Testament of Abraham (T. Ab.)*, a better known pseudepigraphon with which *T. Isaac* often circulates in the Coptic, Arabic and Ethiopic manuscripts;¹⁴ or they treat *T. Isaac* as

Dictionaries and Encyclopedias: M. Philonenko, "Isaaks Testament," *Biblich-historisches-Handwörterbuch*; M.E. Stone, "Testament of Isaac," *Encyclopedia Judaica* 9; J.L. Trafton, "Isaac, Testament of," *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*; K.H. Kuhn, "Coptic Testament of Isaac," *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 2.

Genre: A.B. Kolenkow, "What is the Role of Testament in the Testament of Abraham?," *HTR* 67, (1974); A.Y. Collins, "The Early Christian Apocalypses," *Semeia* 16, (1976); J.J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 16, (1976); A.B. Kolenkow, "The Genre Testament and the Testament of Abraham," in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (ed. Nickelsburg; Missula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976); E.v. Nordheim, *Die Lehre der Alten: I. Das Testament as Literaturgattung im Judentum der hellenistisch-romischen Zeit* (ALGHJ 13; ed. Rengstorff; 2 vols.; vol. 1; Leiden: Brill, 1980); J.J. Collins, "Testaments," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarians Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. Stone; vol. 2 of *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984); J.J. Collins, "The Testamentary Literature in Recent Scholarship," in *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters* (eds. Kraft and Nickelsburg; vol. 2 of *The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Knight; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); A.B. Kolenkow, "The Literary Genre 'Testament'," in *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters* (eds. Kraft and Nickelsburg; vol. 2 of *Society of Biblical Literature The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Knight; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); A. Díez Macho ed. *Apócrifos del Antiguo Testamento* (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1987); K.L. Eades, "Testaments," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* 4; J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (eds. Beck and Freedman; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998); K.M. Woschitz, *Parabiblica: Studien zur jüdischen Literatur in der hellenistisch-römischen Epoche: Tradierung, Vermittlung, Wandlung* (TFW 16; Munster: Wien, 2005); M.d. Jonge, "Testamentenliteratur," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 33.

Tours: M. Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); R. Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (NovTSup 93; Leiden: Brill, 1998).

¹⁴ Scholars believe *Testament of Abraham* is perhaps a second century C.E. work by an Egyptian Jewish author. Nonetheless, this opinion is not conclusive. *T. Ab.* is notoriously difficult to date with any certainty. Delcor, *Le testament d'Abraham, 73-77*; Collins, "The Testamentary Literature in Recent Scholarship," 277; D.C. Allison, Jr., *Testament of Abraham* (ed. Stuckenbruck; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 34-40. The earliest fragmentary manuscript is the Sahidic version of *T. Ab.* dated on paleographic grounds to the fourth century. K.M. Heide, "The Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic Versions of the *Testament of Abraham* and the Emergence of the *Testaments of Isaac* and *Jacob*," in *Non-Canonical Religious Texts in Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (eds. MacDonald and Charlesworth; vol. 14 of *Jewish and Christian Texts in Context and Related Studies*; New York: T & T Clark, 2012), 62.

T. Ab. is notable for its presentation of Abraham: Abraham tries to avoid his death and Abraham metes out punishment on those who sin. It is also notable that Abraham does not leave a testament and final words for Isaac.

a late example of the Jewish and Christian testamentary genre.¹⁵ I submit that these treatments limit how we understand *T. Isaac* because, in the first case, scholars are speaking in hypotheticals that cannot be reasonably demonstrated with the existing evidence; in the second case, the idea that *T. Isaac* imitated *T. Ab.* leads scholars to ignore *T. Isaac* as its own work with its own themes; and in the third case, scholars spend much time constructing genres of ancient texts that do not necessarily indicate function or usage of actual texts.

A concern for origins has limited other scholars from exploring *T. Isaac* in the manner that I do in what follows. I seek to show that the textual community read *T. Isaac* as an ascetical regimen. This portion of my thesis pushes us to think about how a textual community used it, rather than depending on a generic identification to assume *T. Isaac*'s function. In treating it as distinct from *T. Ab.*, I am able to better explore the contents of *T. Isaac* than previous scholars. By surrendering the quest for the ur-*T. Isaac*, I am able to engage *T. Isaac* within a context where a textual community is more safely argued for the text as it has survived. In short, I am asking different questions than those that have preoccupied previous scholars.

In the remainder of this Introduction, I will mention certain preliminary topics. Since most people have not been exposed to *T. Isaac*, a summary of the narrative may be helpful. A brief discussion of *T. Isaac*'s versions provides the reader with background information. I will also make introductory remarks about the relationship between *T. Isaac* and *T. Ab.* and comment on *T. Isaac* as a testament. Then, I will offer my reasons

¹⁵ Scholars theorize a testamentary genre for Jewish and Christian works that are concerned with the death of biblical heroes. Scholars identify a deathbed setting, the last words of the dying character, and a report of the character's death as three elements found in a testament. See below, page 17.

for treating *T. Isaac* as a fourth or fifth century work in an Egyptian Christian monastic context and describe this context.

0.2 Introducing *Testament of Isaac*

0.2.1 A Summary of *Testament of Isaac*

T. Isaac reports the final days of the biblical patriarch Isaac. In the story, the patriarch's life and teaching become examples for the reader who seeks to live a holy life. It opens with an angel announcing Isaac's immanent death and directing him to leave his testament for his descendants. Then the story revolves around Isaac sharing his wisdom with those who gather to his deathbed and portrays him as an example of holy living. The patriarch offers sacerdotal wisdom to the priest of God. He exhorts his audience to live a holy life that demands sinlessness. Isaac reveals to the audience what he sees on his tour of the heavens, where he views the torments awaiting those who sin. While on the tour, Isaac also witnesses a conversation between the Lord and Abraham in which the Lord promises Abraham that all who celebrate the day of Isaac's remembrance by offering a sacrifice in the memory of Isaac will become part of the Abrahamic lineage through God's mercy. The story concludes with the angels, hosts, and saints in the heavens coming down to Isaac's deathbed and taking Isaac's soul back to the heavens on the Lord's chariot. In total, *T. Isaac* invites the reader to identify as a child of Isaac and to heed Isaac's testament. The willing reader finds materials in the story to assist her in becoming like Isaac.

0.2.2 Versions of *Testament of Isaac*

T. Isaac is preserved in multiple versions. In this dissertation, I am dealing specifically with the Sahidic Coptic version of *T. Isaac*, the oldest of the versions.¹⁶ It survives in M577, a manuscript that is dated 894/895.¹⁷ The Bohairic version of *T. Isaac* is witnessed in one manuscript (Cod. Vat. Copt. 61) dated 961/962.¹⁸ Karl H. Kuhn argues that the Bohairic version is translated from Sahidic, although it does not always agree with the extant Sahidic version.¹⁹ The Sahidicisms found in the Bohairic version of *T. Isaac* as well as the general developments in Coptic literature (translations tend to go in the direction from Sahidic to Bohairic) are key factors in Kuhn's determination.²⁰

¹⁶ Kuhn, "The Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 225. In this article, Kuhn provides the Sahidic version. My translations are based primarily on Kuhn's publication. In the process of translation, I did consult the facsimile reproduction of the text found in H. Hyvernat, *Bibliothecae Pierpont Morgan codices coptici photographice expressi* (vol. 53; Rome, 1922). My chapter and verse numbers follow Aranda Pérez. "Testament de Isaac," 289-303. He follows the French translation edited by M. Delcor.

¹⁷ Kuhn, "The Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 225. See the description of the manuscript on H. Hyvernat, *A Checklist of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (New York, 1919), 18. The colophons reveal: the manuscript was produced at the Touton scriptorium in the Fayyum province; and it was donated to the Monastery of St. Michael the Archangel (which is also in the Fayyum province) before August 30, 895 (AM 611, i.e., August 29, 894 – August 29, 895). The manuscript contains a life of Stephen the protomartyr, *T. Isaac*, a homily on Luke 7:36-50 attributed to John Chrystosom, and a homily on Luke 11:5-9 attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria. Kuhn provides an English translation that he later updated. Kuhn, "An English Translation of the Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 325-36; Kuhn, "The Testament of Isaac," 429-39. Recently, Alin Suciuc identified two fragments for the Sahidic that Louis Théophile Lefort dated to around 1000. Unfortunately, the manuscripts Lefort catalogued of the library in Louvain burned in a fire in May 1940. A. Suciuc, *An Old Testament Pseudepigraphon in Coptic: Yet Another Manuscript from the Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac* (2012 [cited June 4, 2012]; available from <http://alinsuciuc.com/2012/05/03/an-old-testament-pseudepigraphon-in-coptic-yet-another-manuscript-from-the-sahidic-version-of-the-testament-of-isaac>). Lefort's comments on the two fragments are found in L.T. Lefort, *Les Manuscrits Coptes de L'Université Louvain: Textes Littéraires* (vol. 1; Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1940), 139-40.

¹⁸ Kuhn, "The Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 225. Guidi, "Il testamento di Isaaco e il testamento di Giacobbe," 224-64. Gaselee provides an English translation for the Bohairic. Gaselee, "Appendix Containing a Translation from the Coptic Version of the Testaments of Isaac and Jacob," 55-75.

¹⁹ Kuhn, "The Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 225-26.

²⁰ Kuhn, "The Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 225.

From the Bohairic version, translators translated *T. Isaac* into the Arabic version. Finally, translators translated the Arabic version into the Ethiopic version.²¹

It is possible that the Sahidic version of *T. Isaac* is a translation from Greek, though no Greek text survives. Peter Nagel argues that there the Coptic versions go back to a Greek Vorlage. Kuhn leaves open the possibility for a Greek original, but Kuhn criticizes Nagel for being far too optimistic and that his evidence is not convincing.²² Kuhn's caution seems warranted given the lack of evidence. One can say it is possible that there was a Greek Vorlage, but like *T. Isaac*'s original date and provenance, scholars cannot say anything with great confidence. My opinion is that Sahidic Coptic is the original language while borrowing loanwords from Greek, a common practice in early Coptic writings.

²¹ In comparison to the paltry single manuscripts for the Coptic versions, there is a proliferation of manuscripts for *T. Isaac* in the Arabic and Ethiopic. For a critical edition of the Arabic and Ethiopic versions of *T. Isaac* as well as the available manuscripts and dates see M. Heide, *Die Testamente Isaaks und Jakobs: Edition und Übersetzung der arabischen und äthiopischen Versionen* (AethFor 56; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000). For an earlier discussion of the Ethiopic, see M. Gaguine, "The Falasha Version of the Testaments of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (University of Manchester, 1965). Gaguine provides an English translation for the Ethiopic version. Barnes translates the Arabic in W.E. Barnes. "Extracts from the Testament of Isaac," in *The Testament of Abraham* (ed. James; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1892), 140-151. Stinespring provides an English translation of *T. Isaac* that is "based on the Arabic text, with some help from the Coptic and Ethiopic" in Stinespring. "Testament of Isaac," 905-911, quote on 903. (Although Stinespring's translation is in Charlesworth's popular collection of Pseudepigrapha, I recommend the readers to look at Kuhn's translation in the *Apocryphal Old Testament* if they are looking for an English translation of *T. Isaac*).

²² P. Nagel, "Zur sahidischen Version des Testaments Isaaks," *WZHalle* 12, (1963): 259-63; Kuhn, "An English Translation of the Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 325-26.

0.2.3 Relationship between *Testament of Isaac* and *Testament of Abraham*

Scholars are confident that *T. Isaac* depends on *T. Ab.*²³ One gets the impression that scholars tend to ignore *T. Isaac* because they view it as derivative or imitative of *T. Ab.*, in the pejorative sense of the terms. One of the benefits of my dissertation is that I am offering the chance for *T. Isaac* to be treated on its own, away from the shadow of *T. Ab.* I think the two works are dissimilar. This does not mean that the writer of *T. Isaac* is not aware of *T. Ab.* It does, however, mean the writer of *T. Isaac* is not merely imitating *T. Ab.*²⁴

The conclusion that *T. Isaac* depended on *T. Ab.* was suggested over a century ago based on the Arabic and Bohairic versions of *T. Isaac*. In 1892, James, working from the Arabic version of *T. Isaac*, suggested four reasons why *T. Isaac* was dependent on *T. Ab.*: (1) in both *T. Isaac* and *T. Ab.* the angel Michael comes to the respective patriarch to announce his death, and, in *T. Isaac*, Michael takes the form of Abraham;²⁵ (2) a

²³ James, *The Testament of Abraham*, 157-59; Guidi, "Il testamento di Isaaco e il testamento di Giacobbe," 224; Gaguine, "The Falasha Version of the Testaments of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" 29; Stone, "Testament of Isaac," col. 11; Delcor, *Le testament d'Abraham*, 78-79; Kolenkow, "What is the Role of Testament in the Testament of Abraham?," 182-84; J.H. Charlesworth, et al., *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research, with a Supplement* (SBLSCS 7S; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 123; E.P. Sanders. "Testaments of the Three Patriarchs: Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: The Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (ed. Charlesworth; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 869; Stinespring. "Testament of Isaac," 904; Aranda Pérez. "Testament de Isaac," 277-303; D.S. Russell, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Patriarchs and Prophets in Early Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 79; Trafton, "Isaac, Testament of," 412; G. Aranda Pérez, "Apocryphal Literature," *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 1:164; Kuhn, "Coptic Testament of Isaac," 612; D. Frankfurter. "The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity: Regional Trajectories," in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (eds. VanderKam and Adler; vol. 4 of *Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*, ed. Tomson; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996), 187; D. Frankfurter, "Early Christian Apocalypticism: Literature and Social World," *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*:423; Heide, *Die Testamente Isaaks und Jakobs*, 4.

²⁴ Recently, K.M. Heide suggests that the works are related and makes a compelling case for the effect of bringing the two works and *T. Jac.* together as a quasi-authoritative collection. Heide's work does not prevent us from considering *T. Isaac* on its own. Heide. "The Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic Versions of the *Testament of Abraham*," 61-72.

²⁵ James, *The Testament of Abraham*, 157.

quotation of *T. Ab.* in *T. Isaac*, translated in English, “From straightness into enlargement;”²⁶ (3) the heavenly tour of Isaac builds on Abraham’s tour, expounding another aspect of eschatology (according to James, *T. Ab.* teaches about the awaiting judgment while *T. Isaac* teaches about the punishment after judgment);²⁷ and (4) *T. Isaac* follows the same general plan as *T. Ab.*²⁸ In his 1900 publication of the Bohairic versions of *T. 3 Patr.*, Ignazio Guidi likewise declared that *T. Isaac* imitated *T. Ab.*²⁹ Guidi identified one additional parallel in the Bohairic *T. Isaac* to *T. Ab.*: (5) a possible reference to the talking cypress.³⁰ The five reasons have become common when stating *T. Isaac* depends on *T. Ab.*

The five reasons do not prove that *T. Isaac* merely imitated *T. Ab.* First, the angels in the two works do not necessitate that *T. Isaac* imitated *T. Ab.*, since the presence of the angels at the end of a life is a literary motif.³¹ Additionally, the angels act differently in the two works.³² Also, in the Sahidic version of *T. Isaac*, the angel who comes to Isaac is

²⁶ James, *The Testament of Abraham*, 157.

²⁷ James, *The Testament of Abraham*, 159.

²⁸ James, *The Testament of Abraham*, 157.

²⁹ Guidi, "Il testamento di Isaaco e il testamento di Giacobbe," 223.

³⁰ Guidi, "Il testamento di Isaaco e il testamento di Giacobbe," 223. Likewise, Gaguine, who is in conversation with James’ argument and not Guidi’s, thinks *T. Isaac* is acquainted with *T. Ab.* on account of “an allusion to Abraham’s speaking tree.” Gaguine, "The Falasha Version of the Testaments of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" 29.

³¹ A variety of examples exist for angels announcing the death of someone in ancient Jewish and Christian writings. Dale Allison notes that the motif of angels (or the character Death) announcing the death of Abraham in *T. Ab.* parallels other traditions related to Moses’ death found in numerous texts, such as *Sifre Deut.* 305, *Tanh. Beraka* 3, *ARN A* 12, *ARN B* 25, and *Deut. Rab. 11:10*. Yet the motif of angels announcing death is also found in Christian historiography, for example, *Hist. Jos. Carp.* 12. Allison, *Testament of Abraham*, 24, 74. Allison lists additional examples of the motif in the Moses tradition and Christian historiography.

not named Michael as the angel is named in *T. Ab.*³³ The presence of the angels in both works does not necessarily mean *T. Isaac* depended on *T. Ab.*

The two allusions to *T. Ab.* that James (his second reason above) and Guidi found in the Arabic and Bohairic versions of *T. Isaac* respectively are not clear in the Sahidic version. First, James found a quotation of *T. Ab.* 7.10 in *T. Isaac* 2.13. *T. Ab.* 7.10 is part of Isaac's dream that he recounts to Abraham concerning Abraham's pending death. In Recension B of the Greek *T. Ab.* 7.10, the wording is: αἴρουσιν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ στενοχωρίας εἰς εὐρυχωρίαν ("They are taking it from straightness into spaciousness"). In context, the verse is a euphemism for death and the trip from life on earth to an afterlife in heaven. *T. Isaac* 2.13 is part of the angel's announcement of Isaac's pending death. In the Sahidic version of *T. Isaac* 2.13, the wording is: εἰναβιτῳ̅ ρῆνογεωτεκο εγογωωϳ̅ ἔβολ ("I will take you from a prison to a place spread forth"). In context, this verse also suggests death and the movement from life on earth to an afterlife in heaven. The Coptic ωτεκο, "prison," is paralleled with στενοχωρίας, "narrowness of space, a confined space."

Although they carry a similar meaning in the context of the passages, Walter E. Crum's *A*

³² In particular, the angel in *T. Ab.* is far more dependent upon the direction of the Lord in his handling of Abraham. The angel in *T. Isaac* is more independent in handling Isaac; the angel does not go back to the heavens to receive additional instructions from the Lord. The angels take on different appearances when meeting the patriarchs; Abraham's angel appears like one of the ones who visited him in the Genesis while Isaac's angel takes the appearance of Abraham. In *T. Isaac* the soul of the patriarch ascends to the heavens on the chariot, while in *T. Ab.* Michael takes up the soul after Death brings Abraham's life to an end. So, while an angel visits the two patriarchs to inform them of their pending death, there are significant differences that should caution scholars to not over emphasize this point of similarity.

³³ Even if the angels had the same name, it would not necessitate a relationship. Michael is quite popular in the angelic hierarchy and one of his duties in early Christian and Jewish literature was taking souls to God, for example. *1 Enoch* 71, *2 Enoch* 72, the Greek *L.A.E.* 37.4-6, *Jude* 9, and *Hist. Jos. Carp.* 13, 23. Allison, *Testament of Abraham*, 76, 398. Allison lists additional examples of Michael's role as soul retriever. Thus, the tradition of Michael coming for souls to take to God could inform the writer of *T. Isaac* without the need to retreat to *T. Ab.* as the source.

Coptic Dictionary does not list στενοχωρίας as an appropriate gloss; one would most likely expect φυλακή.³⁴ James's allusion is inconclusive for the Sahidic version.

Second, Guidi identified in Bohairic *T. Isaac* 3.11-12 a reference to a talking tree in *T. Ab.* 3.1-3. In these verses, while Abraham and the angel walk to Abraham's house, a voice comes from a cypress tree (or tamarisk in Greek Recension B) and declares "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God who summons him to those who love him." Isaac is not present to experience the talking tree. The Bohairic version is the only clear reference to a tree among the versions of *T. Isaac*; in this version, Isaac implies that the tree is related to a past event in which he participated but he does not say it talked.³⁵ In the Sahidic, the text is unclear (ετυματος) at this point but it does not refer to a cypress tree.³⁶ Thus, the second alleged allusion is not located in the Sahidic version of *T. Isaac*, and inconclusive in the Bohairic version of *T. Isaac*.

James identified a parallel in the heavenly tours in *T. Isaac* and *T. Ab.* (his third reason above). At first blush, this parallel seems convincing. Yet, the similarities between the heavenly tours of Isaac and Abraham are not strong, nor are they unique to the patriarchs. Differences abound: Abraham requests his tour while Isaac does not; the tours

³⁴ W.E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (ALR; Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 595.

³⁵ The Bohairic version of *T. Isaac* has a cypress tree (κεφαρισος) at *T. Isaac* 3.11-12. Isaac has just informed Jacob that he is about to die and is making the point to Jacob that God ordains what God ordains. Isaac says, "I also remember a day when the high and flourishing cypress was moved, while I spoke to my lord and father Abraham, and I could do nothing."

³⁶ Kuhn, "The Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 230 n. 3; Nagel, "Zur sahidischen Version des Testamentes Isaaks," 261; Kuhn, "An English Translation of the Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 329 n. 3. Aranda Perez likewise points this out in his dismissal of Delcor. Aranda Pérez. "Testament de Isaac," 284.

go to different places;³⁷ and the events witnessed and the themes of the tours differ.³⁸ The specifics of the tours do not lead one to conclude that *T. Isaac* is necessarily indebted to *T. Ab.* Other early Jewish and Christian works contain heavenly ascents and tours.³⁹ Since the tour of hell is not a unique aspect of *T. Ab.* one should be cautious in pointing to it as evidence for dependency. One should be open to the possibility that the writer of *T. Isaac* drew upon the broader literary milieu. The tours in these texts point to a broader awareness of early Jewish and Christian culture (i.e., angelology, apocalyptic and ascent literature).

James' final reason (his fourth reason above) was that both works share a general plan. Table 1 provides a side-by-side outline of the two works. In general, *T. Isaac* has similarities in the order of the narrative. There is an angelic announcement of pending death to the patriarch, a heavenly ascent, and a death in which the soul comes out of the body and is taken to heaven. The details of the elements and how they are connected are different (how the angel tells the patriarch, what the tour consists of, the death and taking of the soul into the heavens). Most notably, *T. Isaac* contains Isaac's deathbed

³⁷ In *T. Ab.*, Abraham's tour covers all of creation, on earth as well in the heavens where judgment occurs. In *T. Isaac*, Isaac visits hell as well as the place of worship in heaven.

³⁸ In *T. Ab.*, Abraham's tour is concerned with judging who is a sinner deserving judgment. There are two gates in heaven, one leading to life, one leading to destruction (*T. Ab.* B 8.4-16). In *T. Ab.* B 9-12, the theme of judgment develops. Abel is the judge and Enoch is the recorder of the sins (*T. Ab.* B 11.1-10). Then, Abraham and Michael return to the earth and Abraham demands punishment for those he judges as sinners, until the Lord brings Abraham's tour to an end out of concern for the sinners (*T. Ab.* B 12.1-13). In *T. Isaac*, Isaac witnesses the punishments that await sinners in hell (*T. Isaac* 5.5-22) as well as the mercy of God in the conversation between the Lord and Abraham (*T. Isaac* 6.4-21), highlighting the themes of God's punishment of sin and God's mercy.

³⁹ Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*. Cf. Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*. See also Collins who puts the heavenly tour of Isaac into conversation with the apocalyptic genre. Collins, "Early Christian Apocalypses," 61-121.

exhortations about priestly and monastic holiness and sinlessness (*T. Isaac* 4.9-30).⁴⁰

There are no exhortations given in *T. Ab*. Thus, even though the two works follow a similar narrative outline, which may imply some relationship between them, the differences suggest that the writer of *T. Isaac* was not merely imitating *T. Ab*.

Table 1: Outlines of *T. Isaac* and *T. Ab*.

<i>Testament of Abraham</i>	<i>Testament of Isaac</i>
<p>Announcement of Death (ch. 1-7)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Michael Meets Abraham ▪ Share a Meal ▪ Michael Returns to Heaven, Asks God for Assistance ▪ Isaac's Dream and Michael's Interpretation / Announcement 	<p>Announcement of Death (ch.1-3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Angel Visits Isaac / Announcement ▪ Isaac Tells Jacob
	<p>Isaac's Testament (ch.3-5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Words Given to Jacob ▪ Others Gather to Isaac ▪ [Flashback: Isaac's Asceticism] ▪ Isaac's Priestly Wisdom
<p>Ascent of Abraham (ch. 8-12.12)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Abraham Sees All Creation ▪ Abraham Witnesses Judgment in Heaven ▪ Abraham Punishes Sinners on Earth ▪ Returns to House / Burial of Sarah 	<p>Ascent of Isaac (ch.5-6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tour of the Torments of Hell ▪ Tour of the Worship in Heaven ▪ Conversation between Abraham and the Lord
<p>Death of Abraham (ch.13-14)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Michael Adorns Death ▪ Death Visits Abraham ▪ Death Draws out Abraham's Soul / Michael Takes It to Heaven ▪ Isaac Buries Abraham's Body 	<p>Death of Isaac (ch.7)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ God Orders Michael to Prepare to Get Isaac ▪ The Angels, Saints, and the Chariot of the Lord Come for Isaac ▪ Isaac Gives Final Words to Jacob ▪ Isaac's Soul Comes out of the Body, Taken to Heaven on the Lord's Chariot

In sum, I argue that *T. Isaac* was not merely derivative of *T. Ab*. This is not to say that there is not any relationship between the two works. Rather, I recognize that the

⁴⁰ Kuhn, "The Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 227; Kuhn. "The Testament of Isaac," 424; Aranda Pérez. "Testament de Isaac," 284.

writer of *T. Isaac* composed his own narrative about Isaac's death that has its own themes and events, even as there are similarities between the two works.⁴¹

0.2.4 Dying Characters in *T. Isaac* and Testaments

Scholars sometimes mention *T. Isaac* as an example of works that they classify as the testamentary genre.⁴² The Jewish and Christian works labeled as testaments usually report the deaths of biblical patriarchs and heroes of ancient Israel. John Collins notes three general aspects of a testament.⁴³ First, there is a deathbed setting. Second, the dying protagonist speaks last words usually to his family. Third, there is a report of the biblical figure's death. *T. Isaac* resembles some of the elements that scholars assign to the genre. *T. Isaac* contains a deathbed setting; Jacob, Isaac's household, and others gather around Isaac when Isaac's pending death is announced.⁴⁴ *T. Isaac* also narrates the last words of Isaac to those who gathered to him.⁴⁵ Isaac's death is described as well in *T. Isaac*.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Aranada Perez is correct in his assessment of the relationship, "Sirvan estos datos para mostrar que TestIsaac presenta más originalidad de la que normalmente se le atribuye." Aranda Pérez. "Testament de Isaac," 284. Cf. Kuhn, "The Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 227.

⁴² Nordheim, *Die Lehre der Alten*; Collins. "Testaments."; Kolenkow. "The Literary Genre "Testament"."; Eades, "Testaments."; Jonge, "Testamentenliteratur."

⁴³ Collins. "Testaments," 325.

⁴⁴ The writer of *T. Isaac* reveals the deathbed setting throughout the first four chapters until people gather to Isaac. First, the narrator in *T. Isaac* makes it clear that Isaac gave a testament to Jacob when he was about to leave from the body (*T. Isaac* 1.1-2). Next, the patriarch learns of his pending death from the angel (*T. Isaac* 2). Then, in *T. Isaac* 3, there is a dramatic scene in which Jacob and Isaac embrace and cry over their pending separation. Isaac, however, does not argue against God's will but embraces it, discouraging Jacob from wishing to join him since that is not God's will. Jacob then tells the household which gathers around Isaac. Yet the more important gathering to Isaac's deathbed comes through the changing of his visual status from blind to sighted (*T. Isaac* 4.5).

⁴⁵ *T. Isaac* contains Isaac's discourse in which he passes down his wisdom to Jacob and to those who gather to him (*T. Isaac* 3.8-6.21). Isaac speaks to Jacob about the inevitability of death and prophesies the life of Jesus (*T. Isaac* 3.8-20). Isaac passes down sacerdotal wisdom and ethical advice (*T. Isaac* 4.9-30). Isaac also reveals his tour of hell and the heavens (*T. Isaac* 5.3-6.21).

Thus, in general, *T. Isaac* shares aspects that Collins identifies with testamentary literature.

For this dissertation, it is interesting that the last words of dying protagonists in testaments often use traditions related to the dying protagonist that are witnessed in the biblical narratives or early Jewish and Christian writings. Anitra Bingham Kolenkow suggests that there are two types of testaments, the ethical testament and the blessing-revelation testament.⁴⁷ In the former, the protagonist passes down practical ethical advice as his last words to his audience. The protagonist sometimes recounts episodes from his life as examples for the teaching he is sharing with his audience. The blessing-revelation testament offers a blessing which contains a future forecast, often revealed through a heavenly journey of the dying protagonist. Both kinds of last words could be classified as wisdom discourse. Both depend on traditions related to the protagonist. The last words help to portray the dying protagonists and also to provide the important themes for the testaments. The writers did not invent wholesale new events for the dying characters; rather they used familiar episodes and character traits from the Bible and other early Jewish and Christian traditions. Sometimes, writers would transfer motifs from one biblical figure to another if the situation was appropriate.⁴⁸ In general, the individual

⁴⁶ In *T. Isaac*, the narrator reports Isaac's death when Isaac comes out of the body. *T. Isaac* has an ascent of Isaac's soul in the Lord's chariot, escorted by the angels and saints from heaven (*T. Isaac* 6.22-7.3). *T. Isaac* does not mention what happened to Isaac's corpse.

⁴⁷ A.B. Kolenkow, "The Genre Testament and Forecasts of the Future in the Hellenistic Jewish Milieu," *JSJ* 6, no. 1 (1975): 57-71. Kolenkow is writing in response to the tradition typified by Klaus Baltzer and von Nordheim in which *T. 12 Patr.* is used as the basis of the testamentary genre and the implied emphasis on ethical content. K. Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary: In Old Testament, Jewish, and Early Christian Writings* (trans. Green; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 137-66; Nordheim, *Die Lehre der Alten*.

⁴⁸ Kolenkow. "The Literary Genre "Testament"," 265-66.

writer manipulates the tradition associated with the dying character in an attempt to teach about a particular theme or topic of concern to the textual community.⁴⁹

Three examples help to illustrate that protagonists were similar in character to traditions of them found elsewhere in early Jewish and Christian writings.⁵⁰ The *Testament of Job* (*T. Job*)⁵¹ is perhaps an obvious example. *T. Job* depicts Job, renown in ancient traditions (see, for example, James 5:11) for his patient and steadfast endurance in the face of suffering and affliction, as teaching the virtue of endurance and an awareness of heavenly reality.⁵² Job teaches his children about endurance through the example of his struggles with Satan, similar to the Septuagint version of Job.⁵³ A second example of the protagonist's character parallels other traditions about the protagonist is *Testament of Moses*.⁵⁴ The book discusses Jewish fidelity to the law, purity, and salvation

⁴⁹ In her discussion of testaments, Kolenkow says: "One may further note how the figure chosen relates to the point of the teaching: Job, who suffers afflictions, gives girdles of healing; Joseph and the patriarchs tell which of the patriarchal descendents should be obeyed; Solomon can speak about demons because he once controlled them." Kolenkow. "The Literary Genre "Testament", " 266.

⁵⁰ One could also find numerous parallels in the traditions of protagonists in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.

⁵¹ The general range for dating *T. Job* is the first centuries B.C.E. or C.E. The writer of Job was likely Jewish, although Spittler proposed a possible Monastist reworking in the second century C.E. R.P. Spittler. "Testament of Job," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments* (ed. Charlesworth; vol. 13 of *Anchor Bible Reference Library*; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 833-34. The scholarly consensus is that *T. Job* was written in Egypt. Collins. "Testaments," 353.

⁵² Nordheim, *Die Lehre der Alten*, 134; Collins. "Testaments," 351; Jonge, "Testamentenliteratur," 112.

⁵³ Spittler. "Testament of Job," 831; Collins. "Testaments," 349. Küchler believes that other traditions enrich the retelling of the biblical story. M. Küchler, *Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen: Zum Fortgang weisheitlichen Denkens im Bereich des frühjüdischen Jahweglaubens* (OBO 26; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1979), 421.

⁵⁴ The work survives as a palimpsest in a sixth century C.E. Latin manuscript that is illegible for the first three lines and is missing its conclusion. J.P.M. Sweet. "The Assumption of Moses," in *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (ed. Sparks; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 601; J. Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses: A Critical Edition with Commentary* (SVTP 10; eds. Denis and Jonge; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 132-33, 270. *T. Mos.*, sometimes referred to as *Assumption of Moses*, appears to be a turn-of-the-eras Jewish work, written perhaps in Palestine during the first three decades of the first century C.E. R.H. Charles, *The*

awaiting the faithful.⁵⁵ Collins views the work “somewhat loosely as a rewriting of Deuteronomy 31-34.”⁵⁶ Moses as the giver of law, and ideal prophet is able to speak to Israel about its future to encourage its faithfulness, even in times of struggle. The *Testament of Solomon (T. Sol)*⁵⁷ provides an example of Solomon on his deathbed that is comparable to other ancient traditions of Solomon. In general, *T. Sol.* uses Solomon to talk about issues of demonology and magic.⁵⁸ More specifically, *T. Sol.* develops a healthcare theme, using Solomon’s knowledge of demons and magic to discuss illness and healing.⁵⁹ Solomon’s association with magic goes back to 1 Kings 4:29-34.⁶⁰

Assumption of Moses: Translated from the Latin Sixth-Century MS, the Unemended Text of which Is Published herewith, Together with the Text in Its Restored and Critically Emended Form, Edited with Introduction, Notes, and Indices (London: A. & C. Black, 1897), lv-lviii; J.J. Collins. "The Date and Provenance of the Testament of Moses," in *Studies on the Testament of Moses* (ed. Nickelsburg; vol. 4 of *Septuagint and Cognate Studies*; Cambridge, Mass.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973), 15-32; J. Priest. "Testament of Moses," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments* (ed. Charlesworth; vol. 13 of *Anchor Bible Reference Library*; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 921; Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses*, 116-17.

⁵⁵ Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses*, 123; Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 131-32.

⁵⁶ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 130.

⁵⁷ *T. Sol.*, as it stands currently, is a Christian work – but does have parallels with Jewish works. It was likely to have appeared in the third century C.E. The place of composition is likely Egypt, although other regions have been proposed. The transmission history of *T. Sol.* is complicated as C.C. McCown developed it nearly a century ago and as Todd Klutz’s recent alternative composition/redaction history has suggested. In what follows, I take Klutz’s proposal as a basis for understanding *T. Sol.* C.C. McCown, *The Testament of Solomon: Edited from Manuscripts at Mount Athos, Bologna, Holkham Hall, Jerusalem, London, Milan, Paris and Vienna* (9; ed. Windisch; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1922), 30-38, 106-110; D.C. Duling. "Testament of Solomon," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (ed. Charlesworth; *Anchor Bible Reference Library*; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 939-43; M. Whitaker. "The Testament of Solomon," in *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (ed. Sparks; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 735; T. Klutz, *Rewriting the Testament of Solomon: Tradition, Conflict and Identity in a Late Antique Pseudepigraphon* (LSTS 53; eds. Grabbe and Charlesworth; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 14-37.

⁵⁸ McCown, *Testament of Solomon*, 43; Whitaker. "The Testament of Solomon," 733; Jonge, "Testamentenliteratur," 111.

⁵⁹ Nordheim, *Die Lehre der Alten*, 186; Klutz, *Rewriting the Testament of Solomon*.

⁶⁰ Duling. "Testament of Solomon," 945-951; Klutz, *Rewriting the Testament of Solomon*. Duling also points out the exegetical tradition of Solomon as a magician in other works. For example, the association of

I agree with the sentiment of Kolenkow's evaluation,

The author of a testament has to become a convincing historical novelist, putting likely options into the events of his protagonist's life so that the audience will say, "Oh, yes," and be able to make the leap of imagination that is required.⁶¹

Kolenkow captures the idea that the dying protagonist needs to be an expected character, at least within a range that would be acceptable to an audience.⁶² The testamentary works resemble how Bal suggests writers depict traditional figures in her examples from twentieth century culture. Writers of testaments seem to have been conscious of portraying their protagonists in a manner that allowed them to be able to have the audience accept the protagonist.

This discussion of testaments is suggestive for *T. Isaac*. The memory of Isaac in *T. Isaac* was bound by the available traditions of the figure. The writer of *T. Isaac* did not portray Isaac in a novel manner; an audience that knew Isaacic traditions would not have been surprised by this Isaac.

0.3 Date and Provenance of *Testament of Isaac*

The date and provenance of *T. Isaac* are notoriously difficult to identify. In previous generations, some scholars suggest that the work dated from the first two centuries of the Common Era and came from a Jewish community in Egypt. It was only

Solomon and astrology, which the writer of *T. Sol.* relates to Solomon's knowledge of magic and demons, is found in *Wisdom of Solomon* 7.15-22.

⁶¹ Kolenkow. "The Literary Genre "Testament"," 266.

⁶² That the texts were preserved and passed down implies that textual communities accepted the characterization of the protagonists.

later redacted by a Christian editor.⁶³ Others, however, suggest that it is the work of a Christian community, in Egypt, perhaps as late as the fifth century C.E.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, few scholars seem confident in their dating for the work. Given the limits of the evidence when trying to date *T. Isaac*, I prefer to treat *T. Isaac* in a fourth or fifth century C.E. context rather than a first or second century C.E. one. Even if it is not the original context, the benefit of treating *T. Isaac* in a fourth or fifth century C.E. context is that the work remains within a context that is more safely argued rather than placing it into a context for which evidence is lacking.⁶⁵ In reaching this position, I follow Robert Kraft and James Davila in their respective considerations for how one should treat Pseudepigrapha.⁶⁶ When the original date and provenance is unknown, one should begin from a context in which there is some certainty and only move to earlier contexts that are less secure when reliable data is available as a control for moving to an earlier context. Scholars found the Sahidic version of *T. Isaac* among manuscripts from Egyptian monastic libraries. The first known context for *T. Isaac*, then, is Christian monasticism in Egypt.

⁶³ Philonenko, "Isaaks Testament," 776; Charlesworth, et al., *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research*, 124; Stinespring, "Testament of Isaac," 904; Aranda Pérez, "Apocryphal Literature," 164.

⁶⁴ Kuhn, "Coptic Testament of Isaac," 612; Frankfurter, "Early Christian Apocalypticism," 423.

⁶⁵ In the case of *T. Isaac*, a scholar may use it as evidence for reconstructing Egyptian Judaism at the turn of the second century C.E. or they may use it as evidence for reconstructing Egyptian Christian monasticism. If the date and provenance is incorrect and ur-*T. Isaac* is not from an Egyptian Jewish context, *T. Isaac* has been misapplied and led to an incorrect understanding of Egyptian Judaism. If the date and provenance of ur-*T. Isaac* is earlier than the Egyptian Christian monastic context, nonetheless the text has still provided reasonable evidence for our understanding of Egyptian Christian monasticism, since that context is not lost to the history of the text's contexts simply because an earlier context is discovered.

⁶⁶ Kraft developed his arguments in a series of articles throughout his career that are now collected in R.A. Kraft, *Exploring the Scripturesque: Jewish Texts and Their Christian Contexts* (JSJSup 137; Leiden: Brill, 2009). Davila develops and applies his own method (in conversation with Kraft's methodology) in J.R. Davila, *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha: Jewish, Christian, or Other?* (JSJSup 105; Leiden: Brill, 2005).

One of the problems for saying anything with certainty about the date and provenance of *T. Isaac* is what counts as ‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’. In recent years, scholars have problematized the categories of ‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’ for our understanding of ancient traditions. In the case of Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,⁶⁷ we need to be especially cautious in labeling a work ‘Jewish’ or ‘Christian’ so as not to allow our modern assumptions to mislead us. It has become common for scholars to question the boundaries between Jews and Christians in late antiquity. Scholars such as Daniel Boyarin argue that the early ‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’ communities were not distinct communities unaware of each other’s texts, thoughts, and practices.⁶⁸ While there were Jews that were distinct from Christians and Christians that were distinct from Jews, the middle ground was far more complicated with different amounts of participation and interaction between them – and even those that distinguished themselves were still engaging the other.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Old Testament Pseudepigrapha is another problem for scholars. Under this catchall category, scholars group together a group of texts associated with figures from Jewish scripture that do not fit into authoritative canons (i.e. Old Testament, Tanakh, Apocrypha, New Testament) or group of documents found in close proximity (i.e., Dead Sea Scrolls, Nag Hammadi Library). This category comes with theological baggage, since the word Pseudepigrapha implies that the works lack theological authority and are lacking in theological truth. By applying Pseudepigrapha, unfortunately, scholars are offering their implied support to this theological position. Scholars are conscious of the problem, but also have failed to arrive at a scholarly consensus for a better suited name. In absence of a more appropriate and recognized name for this catchall scholarly category, I continue to use the name but do not wish to endorse the negative connotation implied by the name. Cf. Kraft, *Exploring the Scripturesque*.

⁶⁸ J. Lieu, *Image and Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century* (London ; New York: T & T Clark, 1996); D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); J. Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek?: Constructing Early Christianity* (London: T & T Clark, 2002); A.H. Becker and A.Y. Reed eds. *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (vol. 95 of *Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum*; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); J. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁶⁹ For example, in late second century Asia Minor, Melitios is quite vocal about Christians who celebrate Easter but also celebrate Passover with the Jews in *Peri Pascha*. See Lieu, *Image and Reality*.

After the destruction of the Jewish community in Alexandria and Egypt in the second century C.E., the material evidence for Jews in the region becomes non-existent.⁷⁰ The disappearance of evidence leads many to conclude that there was no distinct Jewish community left in Egypt. Yet, the possibility remains that small pockets and individual families of Jews survived the persecutions and remained within Egypt. Furthermore, the importance of Alexandria as a cosmopolitan city would seem to indicate that Jews involved in trade were available for engaging Christians in Alexandria, spreading out into Egypt, even before a large scale rebuilding of the community. Christians could also engage Jews as the Christians traveled to other areas and then bring their knowledge back to their communities. It is also possible that, Christians sought out Jews when they were outside of Egypt, like Origen did in Caesarea when he wanted consultation on Hebrew manuscripts. The movement of people and texts makes it likely that, even if Christians or Jews had never met a real live Jew or Christian they nonetheless had some access to their texts and an image of the other.

The presence of 'Jewish' traditions that are part of the Second Temple period traditions does not necessitate a Jewish original, as either Jew or Christian (or other) could have used the inherited traditions to create a believable character for Isaac. Even when it can be shown that a work contains one of these Second Temple traditions, it does not indicate that the writer or textual community is 'Jewish' or 'not-Jewish'. Second Temple period works were available to the early Christians and passed down in the Christian tradition. So, it does not follow that *T. Isaac* needs to be originally a Jewish work.

⁷⁰ R.S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 275-78.

External evidence, normally used to establish the dating of texts, is a major problem for dating *T. Isaac*. Three types of external evidence are desirable for dating ancient works: dateable manuscripts and fragments, quotations found in other works that can be dated with some certainty, and ancient book lists. First, as mentioned above, *T. Isaac*'s earliest manuscript is dated 894/895 C.E. Two recently identified fragments were dated on paleographic grounds to around 1000 C.E.⁷¹ The manuscripts set the *terminus ad quem* for *T. Isaac* to 894/895 C.E. Second, there are no identified quotations of *T. Isaac* in late antique writings. Third, no ancient catalogue lists *T. Isaac* by name. Perhaps, however, it is referenced in a list found in the *Apostolic Constitutions*.⁷² This is the difficulty that scholars experience when trying to date *T. Isaac*, the external evidence does not provide conclusive proof for how early one ought to date *T. Isaac*, only that it is written by the end of the ninth century C.E.

The manuscripts only demonstrate the latest possible moment – if the first manuscript contained the autograph – that a work is written. It is highly improbable that M577 contains the autograph for *T. Isaac*. In the manuscript's colophon, we discover that a scribe copied M577 for a monastery. His activities are those of a copyist not author. Furthermore, the surviving text of the Sahidic and the surviving text of the Bohairic version of *T. Isaac* do not always agree in ways that, as noted above, indicate the Bohairic was translated from another Sahidic text of *T. Isaac*. So, if 894/895 is the date of

⁷¹ See page 9 n.17 above.

⁷² The *Apostolic Constitutions* is possibly a late-fourth or early-fifth century eight book collection of treatises that is concerned with Christian doctrine, discipline, and worship.

the first known copy of *T. Isaac*, we are left to suggest how much earlier the work could be.

In *Apostolic Constitutions* vi. 16, the author identifies a list of apocryphal books of Moses, Enoch, Adam, Isaiah, David, Elijah, and of the three patriarchs. The reference to the three patriarchs may refer to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁷³ Scholars who treat this as a reference note that in the non-Sahidic versions of *T. Isaac*⁷⁴ scribes often placed it in a collection with *T. Ab.* and *Testament of Jacob (T. Jac.)* called the *Testaments of the Three Patriarchs (T. 3 Patr.)*.⁷⁵ *T. 3 Patr.* is the only collection of books of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that is known from antiquity. Thus, it is suggested that *Apostolic Constitutions* is likely referring to these three works circulating as a collection, even though we do not have manuscript evidence for such a collection until centuries later.⁷⁶ If this is the case, then it is possible that *T. Isaac* may be a fourth century work, since it would need to have gained enough notoriety to be mentioned on a list of apocryphal works in the early fifth century.

⁷³ Aranda Pérez. "Testament de Isaac," 281.

⁷⁴ The manuscript evidence for the three circulating together, however, is absent in the Sahidic. This is not surprising given the limited manuscript evidence. A Sahidic version is known for *T. Ab.* but it does not circulate with *T. Isaac* and no Sahidic version of *T. Jac.* has survived. Yet, sometimes scribes would break up collections and transcribe a work into a manuscript with other works. M577, with its inclusion of *T. Isaac*, may reflect this practice of bringing together works separated from their usual collection. That is to say, the Sahidic *T. Isaac* does not necessarily argue against the possibility for *T. 3 Patr.* circulating together prior to the end of the ninth century.

⁷⁵ The *Testaments of Jacob* is an account of the end of the respective patriarch's life. It suffer from a similar problem for dating that *T. Ab.* and *T. Isaac* face. The predominant hypothesis is that the writer of *T. Jac.* is either the same as *T. Isaac* or is writing after *T. Isaac*. *T. Jac.* is similar to the narrative of *T. Isaac*, suggesting that *T. Jac.* is aware of *T. Isaac*. At the same time the writer of *T. Jac.* weaves details from Genesis into the account.

⁷⁶ James, *The Testament of Abraham*, 155.

The possible reference to *T. Isaac* in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, may point to a possible context for *T. Isaac*. Analogous to Athanasius' concern with defining orthodox writings, the anonymous writer of the *Apostolic Constitutions* is targeting apocryphal works that 'the wicked heretics' wrote. Charges of heresy could be an indication that the groups associated with these works were perhaps Melitian or another Christian group popular in Upper Egypt that used apocryphal books, particularly apocryphal books that connect martyrdom and visions of the heavens.⁷⁷ *T. Isaac*, with its value of sacrifice and Isaac's vision of the heavens, reflects the popular Christian milieu of Upper Egypt in the fourth and early fifth century.

When we turn to the internal evidence, we find useful data for dating the Sahidic version of *T. Isaac*. The internal evidence provides firmer ground for assigning a fourth or fifth century dating to the work. The christological elements in *T. Isaac* are especially important for dating purposes.

The Sahidic version of *T. Isaac* contains five references to Christ and the Trinity (*T. Isaac* 2.16; 3.14-20; 6.21; 6.31; 8.7). First, when Isaac is concerned that Esau will do something to Jacob, the angel responds to Isaac that when he blessed Jacob, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit blessed Jacob as well, so Jacob is not in danger (*T. Isaac* 2.16). At a minimum the phrase reflects some notion of the Trinity. Second, Isaac prophesies the life of Christ in *T. Isaac* 3.14-20. This passage also contains a reference to Christians and their on-going sacrifices and also the celebration of the Eucharist. A third reference occurs in 6.21, the Lord says, "my power and the power of my beloved son and

⁷⁷ D. Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt : Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter," *HTR* 87, no. 4 (1994): 410-17.

the Holy Spirit shall be with them.” In a fourth reference, *T. Isaac* 6.32, the Lord speaks of his future incarnation, death, and resurrection on the third day. Taken with the earlier prophecy of Christ’s life, this verse suggests a Christian context for *T. Isaac*.

Finally, a fifth reference occurs when *T. Isaac* ends with the following words:

And they will come to the first hour of the thousand years, according to the promise of our Lord, and our God, and Our Savior Jesus Christ, through whom every glory is due to him and his good Father and the Holy Spirit, the giver of life to all creation and one in the same being as them, now and always, forever and ever. Amen. (*T. Isaac* 8.7-8)

An ending such as this could be the result of a later redactor or scribe, and is not determinative of an original ending. As a part of the Sahidic version, however, this doxology captures a Nicene-Constantinople notion of the relationship between the three persons of the Christian Trinity (*T. Isaac* 8.8). Kuhn warns against relying upon the doxology for dating,⁷⁸ yet it does point toward a late fourth century orthodox view.

According to those who argue for a Jewish original, the references to Christ and Trinitarian theology are Christian redactions.⁷⁹ If *T. Isaac* 3.14-20 is a Christian redaction of a Jewish original, this entire section would need to be removed, and its omission would take the narrative out of the Christian context of my reading of the Sahidic version. I find it methodologically problematic to assert that the removal of Christian references results in a Jewish original. The assumption seems to be that removing the obvious Christian aspects of *T. Isaac* will reveal a Jewish *T. Isaac*. Such assumptions are the kind

⁷⁸ Kuhn, "An English Translation of the Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 326.

⁷⁹ Philonenko, "Isaaks Testament," 776; Stinespring, "Testament of Isaac," 904. Charlesworth suggest that some of the Christian elements may be "interpolated because they are not grammatically linked to the contiguous sentences and appear to disrupt the flow of thought." Charlesworth, et al., *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research*, 124. Kuhn thinks that "the explicitly Christian elements may have been superimposed, for they appear to be easily detachable." Kuhn. "The Testament of Isaac," 425.

that Kraft and Davila are challenging in their work for determining the provenance of Pseudepigrapha. Does the absence of christological statements make a work non-Christian? And if that work is about a biblical character and does not contain christological statements, does that mean it is a Jewish work? What criteria are used to determine what is from the later Christian redactor? Upon what assumptions are the criteria based? As it has been applied, I am not comfortable in arguing that redaction criticism can provide an ur-*T. Isaac* that is Jewish. It could be Christian, or Jewish, or even neither Jewish nor Christian. In addition, while the presence of the christological and Trinitarian statements provide some context to date *T. Isaac*, their removal pulls *T. Isaac* out of a more certain context and places it into a realm of uncertainty. The absence of the statements does not necessitate the work be dated before the fourth or fifth century. Such a move to reject the christological and trinitarian comments leaves *T. Isaac* unmoored from a plausible context.

I prefer to treat *T. Isaac* as evidence based on what is found in the Sahidic version. As it exists, the Sahidic version provides for a plausible context; the christological and trinitarian references place *T. Isaac* in a Christian context. The theological understandings suggest a late fourth century orthodox view. Even if the doxology is later than the rest of *T. Isaac*, which is a possibility, the other Christological and Trinitarian statements are not inconsistent with a fourth or fifth century context.

T. Isaac has a clear notion of monk (μοναχος) as an identity. Monasticism emerges in the third and fourth century C.E.⁸⁰ According to Siegfried Richter, the title

⁸⁰ D.J. Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966); J.E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert:*

“monk” was already well known and respected in the fourth century, when its use begins to increase steadily.⁸¹ While exhorting his audience, Isaac makes a reference to the relationship between priests and monastics (*T. Isaac* 4.23).⁸² The inclusion of monastics as a recognized group in *T. Isaac* suggests a fourth century date or later.⁸³

T. Isaac makes multiple references to the day of commemoration for Isaac. The Lord mentions the day of Isaac’s commemoration three times in the conversation between the Lord and Abraham (*T. Isaac* 6.8, 12, 15). In the epilogue, the narrator makes reference to the day of the patriarchs’ commemoration (*T. Isaac* 8.6). These brief mentions reflect an awareness of a day of commemoration for Isaac that people are observing. The Coptic Church has a long history of celebrating the three patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – as a group on the 28th of Mesore (August 21).⁸⁴ It is not

Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999).

⁸¹ S.G. Richter. "The Importance of the Fayuom Oasis for Coptic Studies," in *Christianity and Monasticism in the Fayoum Oasis: Essays from the 2004 International Symposium of the Saint Mark Foundation and the Saint Shenouda the Archmandrite Coptic Society in Honor of Martin Krause* (ed. Gabra; Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 4-5.

⁸² “Every man upon the earth, whether priest or monk for after a long time they will love the life of the holy retreat and they will separate from the world and all of its wicked cares, and they will be in the holy service that the angels give to God in purity” (*T. Isaac* 4.23).

⁸³ Some scholars, like Mathias Delcor, argue that *T. Isaac* is Jewish Essene-like, or the Therapeutae, in character on account of references to ritual washing, fasting, holiness of priests, and the river of fire. Philonenko, "Isaaks Testament," 776; Delcor, *Le testament d'Abraham*. I find this argument unconvincing, as the references are not exclusive markers to Essene and Therapeutae communities. These references also fit into an Egyptian monastic community. See Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*.

⁸⁴ D.L. O’Leary, *The Saints of Egypt* (London; New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; Macmillan, 1937), 58. In the *Synaxarium Alexandrium*, the writer(s) briefly highlights the Genesis account of the lives of the three patriarchs, not the stories found in *T. 3 Patr.* I. Forget, *Synaxarium Alexandrium* (CSCO 90 / Ar.13; trans. Forget; Louvain, 1953), 281-85. (Forget mingles two recensions in his Arabic edition [for which he provides a Latin translation].) But, R-G. Coquin warns that to get a full picture of the cult of a saint in the Coptic Church one must have recourse to the various editions of the Synaxarion, and the Coptic Lectionary, and materials that did not find its way into the Synaxarion or the Lectionary. R.-G. Coquin, "Synaxarion, Copto-Arabic," *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 7:2171-90.

evident when the patriarchs were first commemorated among Christians in Egypt. The feast is the result of local practice before it became a part of an orthodox calendar. In Upper Egypt, the celebration of martyrs and biblical figures is already active in the fourth century. *T. Isaac* could, then, testify to the commemoration of the patriarchs in Upper Egypt in the fourth or fifth century.

Finally, *T. Isaac*'s tour of hell is similar to Christian tours of hell (*T. Isaac* 5.2-24). Martha Himmelfarb argues that its resemblance to the *Apocalypse of Paul* and other early Christian tours suggests *T. Isaac* is a Christian work.⁸⁵ Himmelfarb does not view *T. Isaac*'s tour as directly dependent on any other text, rather the writer draws on "well-known motifs of the kind common in the *Apocalypse of Paul* and the later tours, arranging them freely."⁸⁶ Himmelfarb's study demonstrates that fire and geography punishments (such as pits and rivers) are primarily found in the *Apocalypse of Paul*, its related works, and later Christian texts. On the other hand, hanging punishments are popular in the earliest Christian tours and Jewish tours, while later Christian works have few.⁸⁷ *T. Isaac* emphasizes fire as a medium of punishment and has no hanging punishments; the choice of motifs suggests that the tour in *T. Isaac* is from a Christian milieu. 'The-worms-that-sleep-not' in *T. Isaac* is a motif that Himmelfarb finds in other Christian tours as well.⁸⁸ The beasts that torture the sinner in *T. Isaac* are probably of Egyptian origin, since it has a human body with a beast's head – a well known image in

⁸⁵ Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 168, 170.

⁸⁶ Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 168.

⁸⁷ Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 113-15.

⁸⁸ Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 116-19.

ancient Egypt.⁸⁹ The name of the punishing angel, Abdemerouchos, likely goes back to a version of the *Apocalypse of Paul*.⁹⁰ In sum, Himmelfarb concludes that the tour indicates *T. Isaac* is a Christian work, later than other early Christian tours of hell.

The internal evidence of the Sahidic version fits into the fourth and fifth century Egyptian Christian context. While it is possible that an ur-*T. Isaac* could be earlier, I do not find conclusive evidence for an earlier date. One would have to dismiss the christological and trinitarian references as later redactions and the resulting omissions would leave a work that would read quite differently from the Sahidic version.

The claim that *T. Isaac* is originally a Jewish work seems to hinge on the ability of scholars to determine what is ‘Jewish’ and what is not. As I mentioned above, the categories of ‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’ are more fluid than previous generations of scholars treated them. Thus, simply removing the ‘clearly Christian’ redactions does not mean there is a Jewish original. One might expect that a similar account of events would survive elsewhere in other Jewish sources. Otherwise, the evidence for the Jewish original is what scholars find in *T. Isaac*. So it is relevant that Second Temple sources do not offer a similar account of Isaac’s death, or that an amalgamation of surviving Second Temple stories of Isaac’s death does not account for the narrative outline of *T. Isaac*.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 119.

⁹⁰ Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 168.

⁹¹ In my review of relevant rabbinic midrash materials, I did not find an account of Isaac’s death that varied from the Genesis account.

Genesis 35:27-29, the *Book of Jubilees* 35-36,⁹² and *Jewish Antiquities* 1.345-346⁹³ are three sources that give a narrative account of Isaac's death. The Genesis passage is so brief that it contains many gaps and these gaps provide to the reader the opportunity to fill them in. In filling the gaps, the writer of *Jubilees*, and to a lesser degree Josephus in *Jewish Antiquities* (or his sources), adds some important events to the outline account of Isaac's death. The three accounts provide a picture of Second Temple presentations of Isaac's death.⁹⁴

As shown in Table 2, the outlines of the three accounts vary from the outline of *T. Isaac*. Genesis and *Jewish Antiquities* begin the report of Isaac's death with the arrival of Jacob to Hebron. The account of Isaac's death in *Jubilees* begins with the account of Rebekah's last words to her sons and her death. *T. Isaac* does not contain an account of the arrival of Jacob and his family, nor does it mention Rebekah. In contrast to the three earlier accounts, the writer of *T. Isaac* begins his narrative with an announcement of

⁹² The *Book of Jubilees* is a mid-second century B.C.E. work. James VanderKam dates it between 160 and 150. J.C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (ed. Knibb; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 21. *Jubilees* tells an alternative story to Genesis and the start of Exodus. Often, the writer of *Jubilees* closely follows the stories in Genesis. Yet, the writer of *Jubilees* contributes new elements and narrative expansions to the stories, connects legal materials to the stories, enhances and denigrates characters, and establishes a distinct chronological framework. H.S. Kvanvig. "Jubilees - Read as a Narrative," in *Enoch and Qumran Origins: New Lights from a Forgotten Connection* (ed. Boccaccini; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 76.

⁹³ *Jewish Antiquities* is a historiographical work which spans the biblical past to the first century C.E. in twenty volumes. The first century C.E. Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote *Jewish Antiquities* sometime in the 90's. Josephus seems to have knowledge of multiple versions of Genesis. L.H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (HCS 27; eds. Bulloch, et al.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 25-30. In addition, Josephus as a Jew immersed in Judaeen culture of the first century would have been aware of popular teachings related to the biblical patriarchs.

⁹⁴ In addition, the late third century B.C.E. Alexandrian Jew Demetrius the Chronographer adds a detail that Jacob arrives at Hebron the year before Isaac died at the age of 180. The late third – early second century B.C.E. *Aramaic Levi Document* shows Isaac teaching Levi after Jacob's arrival at Hebron but does not discuss Isaac's death.

Isaac's pending death by the angel (*T. Isaac* 2.1-12). *Jubilees* does show some similarities with *T. Isaac*, but the similarities also demonstrate differences. In *Jubilees* and *T. Isaac*, Isaac announces his death to Jacob (*T. Isaac* 3.1-7); yet, Esau is also present at Isaac's deathbed in *Jubilees*. Isaac's testament, or last words, is found in both works. The contents, however, and the identity of Isaac's audience are different in the two accounts. In *Jubilees*, Isaac is talking to Esau and Jacob, divides his property, and exhorts them to brotherly love. In *T. Isaac*, Isaac is talking to Jacob, his household, the leaders of the community that comes to see him, and the priest of the Lord. *T. Isaac*'s testament includes priestly instructions and moral exhortations (*T. Isaac* 4.8-30). The writer of *T. Isaac* includes Isaac's tour of hell and the heavens (*T. Isaac* 5.2-6.21). Such an account is not found in Genesis, *Jubilees*, and *Jewish Antiquities*. The three earlier sources have similar deaths and burials for Isaac, although Josephus adds a brief eulogy at the end not found in the other two. On the other hand, in *T. Isaac*, angels, saints, and the chariot of the Lord come down from the heavens to take Isaac's soul out of his body and take it back to heaven on the Lord's chariot (*T. Isaac* 6.22-7.3). *T. Isaac* does not mention what happened to Isaac's corpse.

Table 2: Accounts of Isaac's Death

<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>	Genesis	<i>Testament of Isaac</i>	<i>Book of Jubilees</i>
Rebekah's Death (1.345)			Rebekah's Testament and Death (ch. 35)
Jacob Comes to Hebron (1.345)	Jacob Comes to Hebron (35:27)		
		Announcement of Death (ch.1-3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Angel Visits Isaac / Announcement ▪ Isaac Tells Jacob 	Announcement of Death (36.1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Isaac tells Jacob and Esau
		Isaac's Testament (ch.3-5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Words Given to Jacob ▪ Others Gather to Isaac ▪ [Flashback of Isaac's Asceticism] ▪ Isaac's Priestly Wisdom 	Isaac's Testament <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Isaac's Last Words to His Sons (36.2-11) ▪ Division of Property and Blessing (36.12-16)
		Ascent of Isaac (ch.5-6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tour of the Torments of Hell ▪ Tour of the Worship in Heaven ▪ Conversation between Abraham and the Lord 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Isaac Dies (1.345) ▪ Isaac Buried (1.345) ▪ Narrator's Eulogy (1.346) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Isaac Dies (35:28-29a) ▪ Isaac Buried (35:29b) 	Death of Isaac (ch.7) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ God Orders Michael to Prepare to Get Isaac ▪ The Angels, Saints, and the Chariot of the Lord Come for Isaac ▪ Isaac Gives Final Words to Jacob ▪ Isaac's Soul Comes out of the Body and Returns to Heaven on the Lord's Chariot 	Death of Isaac <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Isaac Dies (36.17-18) ▪ Isaac Buried (36.18)

Genesis, *Jubilees*, and *Jewish Antiquities* do not offer sufficient similarities as to suggest that there was a Jewish *T. Isaac*. The lack of evidence cannot completely eliminate the possibility, but the differences between earlier Jewish accounts and *T. Isaac* suggest that *T. Isaac* cannot be easily excised of its “Christian” elements to find a Jewish original. Such a project is too speculative for my taste. As it survives, *T. Isaac* is a Christian text. It fits within the fourth and fifth century C.E. Egyptian Christian context.

As I mentioned above, the distinction between what is Jewish and what is Christian is problematic. The supposed Jewishness of *T. Isaac* can be accounted for in the Egyptian monastic context of the fourth and fifth century. Upper Egypt offers a monastic context in which ‘Jewish’ elements appeared. David Frankfurter suggests:

Both the charismatic prophets of the desert and the ‘popular apocalypticism’ must have evolved from within Upper Egyptian Jewry before its near extermination in 117 C.E. [...]. But there are presently no data with which to nuance these suppositions.⁹⁵

Tito Orlandi suggests that Old Testament pseudepigrapha in Coptic was “originally written in a milieu characterized by the mixture of Jewish and Christian elements in the presence of some form of Egyptian nationalism.”⁹⁶ Frankfurter notes the proclivity of the biblical figures in the third to fifth century monastic communities:

rural Egyptian Christianity has a ‘Hebraistic’ basis, insofar as the paradigms for charisma, social identity, and eschatology were rooted archaistically in biblical legend, its prophets, supernatural channels, and accomplishments, while the participants had no relationship to Judaism.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Frankfurter. "The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity," 163.

⁹⁶ T. Orlandi. "Coptic Literature," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (eds. Pearson and Goehring; *Studies in Antiquity and Christianity*; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 58.

⁹⁷ Frankfurter. "The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity," 185.

That is, non-Jewish Christian monastics are drawing on biblical examples for their contemporary religiosity. Upper Egyptian Christians show a special interest in the patriarchs and other biblical heroes as examples of holiness.⁹⁸ *T. Isaac* need not be originally Jewish in such a context; the use of biblical exemplars and the nature of Coptic Old Testament pseudepigraphical writings support Egyptian monasticism as the likeliest possibility for the cultural context of *T. Isaac*.

Four minor points also support locating *T. Isaac* in an Egyptian context. First, *T. Ab.* is often located as a Jewish work written in Egypt. If the writer of *T. Isaac* was aware of *T. Ab.*, which seems likely, then the locale for *T. Isaac* may be Egypt as well. Second, Kuhn offers the possibility that one could explain *T. Isaac*'s inclusion of moral and religious teachings on account of the strong practical and pastoral interests in Coptic literature.⁹⁹ Third, the later versions of *T. Isaac* contain a tradition that associates the *T. 3 Patr.* with Athanasius of Alexandria. While this is a later attribution, it is suggestive for the text's provenance in Egypt.¹⁰⁰ Fourth, I find it odd that no version of *T. Isaac* survived outside of the Egyptian and Ethiopian region, when *T. Ab.* is found in numerous versions. The lack of evidence does not mean that it did not come from another region. But, the lack does not counter the consensus that Egypt is the provenance of *T. Isaac*. As

⁹⁸ Frankfurter, "Early Christian Apocalypticism," 423.

⁹⁹ Kuhn. "The Testament of Isaac," 424.

¹⁰⁰ Kuhn. "The Testament of Isaac," 424.

The scribe who copied the Bohairic version credits Athanasius with authorizing *T. 3 Patr.* In relation to the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which place the books of the three patriarchs outside of Christian truth, and Athanasius' canon of scripture, the scribe seems to be aware that there is a challenge for reading these works as authoritative. The invocation of Athanasius' name, then, functions to transfer orthodox authority to *T. 3 Patr.* Heide makes a similar point, Heide. "The Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic Versions of the *Testament of Abraham*."

part of the cumulative argument, these last four points support the proceeding discussion for locating *T. Isaac* in an Egyptian context.

0.4 A Brief Description of the Egyptian Christian Context

The fourth and early fifth century was a formative period for Christianity in Egypt. The model of Christian authority and orthodox theology was at stake and the Alexandrian see played a central role in the ongoing debate in the emerging context of imperial Christianity. The contest between different models of authority with different notions of salvation and with different forms of religious practice is part of the background in which I place the textual community for *T. Isaac*.

In his important article “Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria’s Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter,”¹⁰¹ David Brakke suggests that Athanasius’ letter reflects social conflicts that are occurring in Egypt in the fourth century. Brakke identifies two prominent groups that Athanasius had in mind when writing his festal letter: ‘teachers’ – particularly Arians – and Melitians. These two groups offered alternative models of authority to the model that Athanasius supported.

The teachers, located within the context of schoolrooms of an academic form of Christianity, had authority based on the teachers’ charisma. In opposition to this model of authority, Athanasius sought to replace the teachers’ authority with a canon of Christ’s teachings, which the bishops read in a sacramental context.¹⁰² The Melitians had an alternative episcopal hierarchy to the Alexandrian episcopacy led by Athanasius.

¹⁰¹ Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt," 395-419.

¹⁰² Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt," 398-99.

Athanasius excluded certain Christian writings “to reduce the influence of apocalyptic and visionary ideas that supported the Melitian claim to be the true church of the martyrs.”¹⁰³

The first model of authority was the model associated with the teachers. The academic form of Christianity was outside of the authority of the episcopal hierarchy in early Alexandrian Christianity.¹⁰⁴ It is likely that the academic form of Christianity was more ancient for Alexandrian Christianity. The study circles encouraged philosophical speculation and allowed for a diversity of opinions on certain Christian teachings. Men and women participated in this form of Christianity. The study circles distinguished between advanced students and ordinary Christians. Brakke identifies academic Christianity with an “open canon,” since for members of the study circles truth could be found in non-Christian literature, Jewish writings, and Christian books.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the study circles focused on Christian scriptures. The teachers at the center of academic Christianity had authority based on unique God-given gifts. Their gifts were reflected in their visions of Christ, mystical experiences, and ascetic lifestyles. The teachers also claimed an intellectual family tree that extended back to Jesus or the Apostles.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt," 399.

¹⁰⁴ The episcopal and academic Christianities (as scholars have categorized these forms) differed on their centers. Episcopal Christianity centered around practices of worship and is located in the parish. Academic Christianity centered around the teacher and scholastic questions, speculation, and debate. The two were not mutually exclusive, but were in competition with each other.

¹⁰⁵ Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt," 401-2.

¹⁰⁶ Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt," 402.

In the fourth century, Arius became a presbyter in an Alexandrian parish. Arius embodied an academic Christian spirituality¹⁰⁷ and he transformed the parish into a schoolroom.¹⁰⁸ Arius's teachings came into conflict with Alexander the bishop of Alexandria which led to a synod condemning Arius, and eventually the Council of Nicaea.

Besides the conflict over authority, the conflict with the orthodox and non-Nicene groups disparaged as Arians was also about the correct understanding of Christ and salvation. One of the key features of non-Nicenes was their emphasis on the creaturely aspect of Christ.¹⁰⁹ This had implications for salvation. An emphasis on Christ as creature meant that salvation was something that humans could achieve through progress in their virtue. Christ was the model for progressing in virtue and salvation was the reward.¹¹⁰

The second model of authority was associated with the Melitians. The Melitian episcopacy developed as a rival to Athanasius' episcopal hierarchy. It resulted from the events during the Great Persecution at the start of the fourth century. At the time, Melitius was bishop of Lycopolis. When Peter, the bishop of Alexandria, went into hiding, Melitius intervened in the Alexandrian sphere, for example, by installing priests. Peter excommunicated Melitius in 305. Nonetheless, Melitius established a rival episcopacy and the two bishops disagreed about treatment of lapsed Christians –

¹⁰⁷ See, R. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002).

¹⁰⁸ Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt," 404.

¹⁰⁹ R.C. Gregg and D. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981); R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988); Williams, *Arius*.

¹¹⁰ Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism*.

Melitians promoted a longer period of penance than the Petrines (led by Alexander after Peter's martyrdom and later Athanasius). The Council of Nicaea ruled that the Petrine hierarchy should integrate the Melitian bishops and priests into its ecclesiastical body, and Melitius was to retain the title bishop but without a see. Nonetheless, the conflict endured between the two groups. The arguments between the Melitians and the Petrines were about ecclesiastical organizations, not theological teaching.

Athanasius presented the Melitians as writing apocryphal works attributed to biblical figures. Brakke finds it plausible that the Melitians and similar groups treated such literature as scripture and legitimated their teachings through the use of apocryphal books, which were not available to ordinary Christians.¹¹¹ Besides these apocryphal books, the Melitians claimed authority as the true church, the church of the martyrs. The Melitians supported the cult of the martyrs and promoted an on-going revelation associated with the cult. Through the martyrs, God continued to speak. The Melitians had a larger canon than Athanasius' that helped to legitimize their version of the cult of martyrs and on-going revelation as well as their episcopal hierarchy.

Athanasius was the champion of orthodoxy. The canon found in his letter presented a model of authority in which the orthodox bishop was the authorized interpreter of the canon. The orthodox bishop was the faithful transmitter of God's Word. For Athanasius, the only teacher was Christ, and the correct understanding of Christ's teaching was available only through the orthodox bishops.

With the Edict of Milan, the persecutions of Christians ceased and as a result an important shift in imperial policy toward Christianity occurred during the fourth century.

¹¹¹ Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt," 413.

Christianity went from being outlawed to being an imperial religion. Christians enjoyed the benefaction of the emperor, particularly the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Christian leaders rose to prominence in important cities of the empire, such as the bishop in Alexandria. With the imperial support came the need to define Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This need was reflected in the numerous synods and creeds as the catholic Church struggled to articulate the faith as both inclusive and true to the received apostolic tradition, gospel of Jesus Christ, and Christian scriptures.

As I mentioned above, I am discussing one of *T. Isaac*'s textual communities, one made up of monastics. Monastic culture thrived in Christian Egypt during the fourth century. While monasticism as a phenomenon was earlier than the fourth century, the fourth century was the period in which the Pachomian Koinonia was established. The Pachomians were coenobitic monastics, who lived together in monasteries. Semi-anchoretic communities also existed in which monks lived in individual cells or caves. While the monks lived separately from non-monastics, they were not isolated. Monks were involved in commerce with non-monastics. Monks were engaged with other Christians, including the controversies boiling over in Alexandria and elsewhere. Non-monastics, priests, bishops, imperial officials visited the monasteries and the monks would visit the cities.

The Egyptian monks were part of the literary / scribal culture of late antiquity that saw texts circulated between different groups. Harry Gamble and Larry Hurtado each demonstrate that there was a literary/scribal culture in early Christianity that helped to

promote the exchange of texts between communities.¹¹² The circulation of texts sometimes resulted in different groups possessing texts that were primarily of importance to another group. That is to say, just because we think a particular community was ‘Jewish’ or ‘Christian’ does not mean that they did not have access to works we have come to label as ‘Jewish’ or ‘Christian’. Furthermore, the Egyptian monastics were not as isolated as previous generations have presented them.¹¹³ They communicated with the outside world and participated in the circulation of texts. Monastic communities of the coenobitic kind had community libraries as well as some scriptoria, and they trained the new members of the community to ensure they would be able to read and recite from the Bible. The Egyptian monastics lived in a textual environment in which they would have had access to more works than just the biblical canon.

0.5 Plan of the Dissertation

In what follows, I will argue that *T. Isaac*’s textual community read *T. Isaac* as an ascetical regimen for realizing a new self. The new self is modeled on *T. Isaac*’s memory of the tradition of Isaac. In the first three chapters of this dissertation, I look at three characteristics of Isaac in *T. Isaac* as remembered tradition of Isaac. I contextualize these characteristics within the Egyptian monastic context. The three characteristics of Isaac portray the three dimensions of a model of Isaac that *T. Isaac*’s textual community seeks to imitate in becoming children of Isaac. In Chapter One, I compare Isaac as a priestly

¹¹² H.Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995); L.W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006). See also, M.H. Williams, *The Monk and the Book: Jerome and the Making of Christian Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

¹¹³ Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert*.

figure in Isaacic traditions to *T. Isaac*. In Chapter Two, I compare Isaac as a sacrifice in Isaacic traditions to *T. Isaac*. In Chapter Three, I compare Isaac's blindness in Isaacic traditions to *T. Isaac*. Through the use of comparison between *T. Isaac* and Isaacic traditions circulating in antiquity, I hope to show how *T. Isaac*'s textual community remembered Isaac as a model who endorsed priestly and monastic holiness, obedience to God's command, and the practice of asceticism. The memory of Isaac was developed within the Isaacic traditions. At the same time, the memory of Isaac was constructed in a manner that is relevant to the Egyptian monastic context through links to the past.

In Chapter 4, I discuss how *T. Isaac*'s textual community employed *T. Isaac* within Egyptian monasticism. The monastics members of *T. Isaac*'s textual community read *T. Isaac* as an ascetical regimen for realizing the true self. The ascetical practices described in *T. Isaac* gave rise to a new subjectivity. The Isaac of *T. Isaac* was a model and guide for the ascetic. By becoming children of Isaac and remembering and performing the tradition of Isaac, the textual community of *T. Isaac* sought to realize their true self.

Chapter 1

Isaac as Priestly Authority

When we turn to the characteristics of Isaac in *T. Isaac*, we see the work portrays Isaac as a priestly authority. Isaac performs priestly acts and passes down sacerdotal wisdom. For those of us without a remembered tradition of Isaac as a priest, this will no doubt seem an odd portrayal since Isaac is not characterized as a priest in Genesis. Yet, as I show in this chapter, *T. Isaac* draws on an existing tradition of Isaac and constructs a remembered tradition of Isaac that would be meaningful for the fourth or fifth century Egyptian monastic context. *T. Isaac*'s priestly Isaac offered the textual community a model for being a child of Isaac in fourth – fifth century monastic Egypt who was able to negotiate the monk-clergy relationship that was part of the fourth-fifth century Egyptian monastic context.

What do I mean when I write of remembered traditions of Isaac? A tradition is a shared collective memory that is passed through generations.¹¹⁴ Flood suggests that memory is the capacity to conserve information deemed important for the community. The textual community received tradition and constructed tradition in its memory of the Isaacic tradition. The remembered tradition found in *T. Isaac* was limited by the

¹¹⁴ Flood's theory of asceticism as a performance of the memory of tradition influences my understanding throughout this paragraph. Flood, *The Ascetic Self*, 8-11.

boundaries of the Isaacic traditions that others had previously passed down. One way for us to conceive of the Isaacic tradition is as the exegetical trajectories that one finds in the ancient interpreters of Genesis. The various interpretations are exegetical memories that interpretive communities choose to pass down to future generations. Such exegetical trajectories would seem to limit the possibilities for how the textual community could remember the Isaacic tradition found in *T. Isaac*. The enactment of the tradition enlivened the textual community's present by linking it to the past. The textual community actively reconstructed the Isaacic tradition through its ascetic practices.

In this chapter, I will discuss the relationship between the monk and clergy that is part of the fourth-fifth century Egyptian monastic context. Next, I will explore the traditions pertinent to Isaac as priestly authority. In the third section of the chapter, I will demonstrate that *T. Isaac* remembered Isaac as a priestly authority.

1.1 The Egyptian Context

An ongoing issue in fourth and fifth century Egypt was the relationship between monks, priests, and bishops. This issue was especially important as the orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchy sought the monks support against opposing groups such as the Arians and Melitians. While monasticism was at first independent from the structures of the church, the orthodox bishops sought to bring the monasteries under their control.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ D. Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1998); S. Moawad. "The Relationship of St. Shenoute of Atripe with His Contemporary Patriarchs of Alexandria," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt: Volume 1: Akhim and Sohag* (eds. Gabra and Takla; New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008).

The literary representations of the monk-clergy relationship in early monastic literature¹¹⁶ show the way that monks might negotiate the relationship and continue to live the monastic life without the influence of clerical authority. In the Egyptian monastic context, *T. Isaac*'s portrayal of Isaac as a priestly authority would have been pertinent for its textual community comprised of monks in their quest for holiness.

Bishops desired to ordain monks and bring them under control of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Bishops also sought to ordain monks to gain popular support and enhance the prestige of their own see. Although the bishops were eager to ordain monks, the monastic literature depicts the monks attempting to avoid ordination so that they could continue to live a life of monastic piety. In the Bohairic *Life of Pachomius*, Pachomius evaded being ordained when Athanasius visited his monastery (Bohairic *Life of Pachomius* 28). The bishop of Nitentori wanted Pachomius ordained so that he could bring all the monasteries of his bishopric under Pachomius' authority and, thus, under the control of the bishop. In the alphabetical collection of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, numerous sayings show bishops attempting to ordain monks. For example, Basil the Great ordained an exceptionally obedient monk as a priest and took the monk back to the bishop's palace (Basil the Great 1). This story reflects what was at stake for the monk:

¹¹⁶ The traditional monastic literature contains several genres (the saint's *Life*; travel literature; instructional literature; and Sayings of the Fathers). A. Louth. "The Literature of the Monastic Movement," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (eds. Young, et al.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 375. It is important to remember that traditional monastic literature is an idealized portrayal of monasticism from the perspective of the orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchy, not necessarily an accurate representation of Egyptian monasticism. Nonetheless, the representations do offer hints of possible tensions between monks and clergy.

ordination threatened the monk's ability to live the monastic life. The new priest had to leave the monastic life and enter the clerical life.¹¹⁷

A common way that monastic literature depicts monks evading ordination was the threat or action of self-mutilation. In the *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, the writer reports that there were three monks in Nitria who on account of their virtue were under compulsion to become bishops, but cut off their ears because of their piety (*Lives of the Desert Fathers* XX.14).¹¹⁸ According to the *Lausiatic History*, Ammonius was a monk who avoided being ordained. When people first attempted to make Ammonius a priest, he cut off his left ear. When they persisted he threatened to cut out his tongue (*Laus. His.* XI.1-3). Ammonius' extreme actions demonstrate the lengths to which monks would go to avoid becoming a priest. If a monk became a priest, he would have to give up his monastic life to fulfill the call of the bishop. Thus, it seems to become an act of piety to reject the call.¹¹⁹

While a monk becoming a priest could result in the monk leaving the monastic life for the clerical life, there was also the possibility that a priest-monk would remain in a monastic community.¹²⁰ The presence of priest-monks could pose a threat to the

¹¹⁷ A similar view is reflected in a saying of Matoes, it is reported that a monk was forced to become a priest. The monk was grieved that he would have to separate from his companion monk and no longer be able to say prayers alone (Matoes 9).

¹¹⁸ According to the 22nd Apostolic Canon, anyone who mutilated himself could not become a cleric. N. Russell and B. Ward, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (CSS 34; trans. Russell; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1981), 136. It may also go back to Leviticus 21 and the prohibition of a priest with a blemish coming near to the Lord's altar.

¹¹⁹ This act of piety, which results in the monk not becoming a priest, should be differentiated from the act of humility, where a monk initially rejects ordination out of humility, but later accepts the role.

¹²⁰ Nonetheless, *Lives of the Desert Fathers* also presents the possibility that priests could also live a successful monastic life (Copres [*Lives of the Desert Fathers* X], Apelles [*Lives of the Desert Fathers*

monastic community's harmony. Status-seeking priest-monks might lord their priesthood over non-priest monks or the non-priest monk might envy the priest-monk and disrupt the ideal harmony of the monastic community. As a monastic leader, Pachomius cared primarily about the harmony of the monasteries, as such he worried about the potential disruption priestly-status could have. According to the *Life*, "our Father Pachomius did not want any clerics in his monasteries, for fear of jealousy and vainglory," and Pachomius warned "it is better not to seek after such things," "lest this should be an occasion for strife, envy, jealousy, and even schisms to arise in a large number of monks" (Bohairic *Life of Pachomius* 25). In the first Greek version, Pachomius warned the monks that "the clerical dignity is the beginning of the temptation to love of power" (First Greek *Life of Pachomius* 27). These two versions of *Life of Pachomius* view ordination as a threat to harmony in the monastic community as well as to individual monks.¹²¹

Nonetheless, if a priest sought admittance to the community, Pachomius would accept him as a monk. Pachomius respected him as priest but required that he follow the rules of the community like any other monk (Bohairic *Life of Pachomius* 25). If a monk from elsewhere was a priest, Pachomius exhorted the monks not to vilify the priest-monk (First Greek *Life of Pachomius* 27).

XIII.1]. Eulogius [*Lives of the Desert Fathers* XVI], Sarapion [*Lives of the Desert Fathers* XVIII], Dioscorus [*Lives of the Desert Fathers* XX], and Piammonas [*Lives of the Desert Fathers* XXV]).

¹²¹ In a similar vein, Evagrius Ponticus writes about the danger of a monk seeking ordination. When talking about the spirit of vainglory, Evagrius warns that it leads to desires to hunt after praise. In this passage, in vanity, one seeks the priesthood, and while one may become a holy priest, he will be bound and handed over to the spirit of impurity. (*Praktikos* 13) Thus, there was a danger in seeking to attain the priesthood for the sake of one's own vanity. This is not to say Evagrius did not see the priesthood as an institution meriting respect. Priests performed a role in which they purify the monks through the holy mysteries. They were parallel to the Lord, while the elders were parallel to the angels (*Praktikos* 100).

Even if some monks vilified priest-monks on occasion, monks esteemed the priesthood as well in monastic literature. In a saying of John the Dwarf from the *Apophthegmata*, monks treated priests with great respect. A priest offered drink to some of the monks but no one accepted except for John the Dwarf who was the youngest of the men. The older men rebuked him for allowing himself to be served by a priest. John the Dwarf, however, recognized that the priest was rewarded when someone accepted the drink that he offered (John the Dwarf 7). The monks, in their humility, viewed priests as superior to them so that the priest should not serve them. John the Dwarf, however, shifts the perspective from “who should serve whom” to “the joy one receives from serving others.” The saying depends on an attitude that esteems the priests over non-priest monks to make John the Dwarf’s punch line effective.

Priests played a role in the liturgical and sacramental life of the monastic community. Since the priests’ duties were related to the performance of the liturgy and sacraments of the church, monks required priests for a weekly worship service and to perform the sacraments of the church.¹²² Since the Pachomian community did not initially have priests as members of the *Koinonia*, the monks would visit a local church to celebrate the Eucharist on Saturday, and the priest of the church would visit the Pachomian monasteries’ churches for Sunday morning service.¹²³ In the *Apophthegmata*, Mark the Egyptian lived without leaving his cell for thirty years, during which time a

¹²² The major role for priests in monastic life was to celebrate the Eucharist. L. Regnault, *The Day-to-Day Life of the Desert Fathers in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Petersham, Mass.: St. Bede's Publications, 1999), 162-64.

¹²³ A. Veilleux. "Pachomian Community," in *The Continuing Quest for God: Monastic Spirituality in Tradition and Transition* (ed. Skudlarek; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 53; Regnault, *The Day-to-Day Life of the Desert Fathers in Fourth-Century Egypt*, 165. See the Bohairic *Life of Pachomius* 25.

priest brought him the Eucharist (Mark the Egyptian 1). When a priest was not present, monastic literature often describes an angel performing the priest's duties. In the *Life of Onnophrius*, an angel served the anchorite Onnophrius the Eucharist, taking the priest's place in offering the sacrament (*Life of Onnophrius* 17). A priest was also required for the sacrament of baptism. In the *Life of Pachomius*, when one monastery did not have a priest to administer the sacrament of baptism, an angel performed the function of priest for a dying catechumen (Bohairic *Life of Pachomius* 81). Whether monks lived in isolation or in community, or somewhere else on the monastic life continuum, the monk depended on the priest to fulfill liturgical and sacramental duties.

In the monastic community, leadership roles were determined, in general, according to the quality of the monk not on account of titles a monk had gained. Lucien Regnault suggests that while a priest might fulfill priestly duties for the monastic community, priestly ordination was separate from monastic authority. In anchorite and semi-anchorite communities, elders had spiritual and moral authority. It was as an elder that a monk who happened to be a priest might have authority in such communities. In the coenobitic communities, the founding father or the appointed successor monk was sovereign, an authority not based on one's priestly authority.¹²⁴

The *Apophthegmata Patrum* suggests that the monks and the priests had limited authority in dealing with each other's affairs. In two of the sayings of Poemen, the dynamics between monks and clergy relationship are apparent. In one saying, a priest from Pelusia went to the monks' synaxis and took away the habits of some of the brethren who he had heard were lax in their practices (Poemen 11). The saying implies a

¹²⁴ Regnault, *The Day-to-Day Life of the Desert Fathers in Fourth-Century Egypt*, 127.

tension between monk and priest over who policed the behaviors of the monks. The priest initially thought he had authority over the monks' practices, and thus felt justified in taking the monks' habits. Later, he went to Poemen to consult with the desert father. Poemen's response indicates that the monastic community rejected the priest's authority in matters of practice. In Poemen's reasoning, both the monks in question and the priest of Pelusia had a propensity to sin, so the priest was not in a position to restrict the monks from participating in the monastic community. In the other relevant saying, Poemen provided instruction for how a monk was to resolve a grievance against him. The monk was to take two brothers with him to see the other person involved in the complaint, then five, and, if he was not pardoned in either instance, then a priest. If taking a priest along did not help the monk gain pardon, Poemen suggested praying to God and to no longer worry about it (Poemen 156). Here, a priest became a mediator only when monastic efforts failed. The priest's authority would be useful for settling a grievance, but was not the primary way a monk should look to settle a grievance against him. These two sayings of Poemen do not give the priest the authority to punish monks – that remains a matter for the monastic community. Yet, Poemen did allow the priest a mediator role, if the monastic community was unable to settle a grievance on its own. The sayings suggest monks tried to limit when priests could exert their priestly authority (especially priests outside the monastic community's hierarchy) in the affairs of the monastic communities.

Finally, monastic literature also portrays the leaders of monastic communities negotiating their relationship with the bishops.¹²⁵ While the monks deferred to the

¹²⁵ It should be remembered that the *Life of Pachomius* tends to be more orthodox in its memory of Pachomius and other leaders of the Pachomian Koinonia than was likely the case. Nonetheless, the account still points to an on-going question of how the monks and clergy were to relate to each other. The bishop's

bishops in some matters of theology, the monastic leaders maintained their own authority. In the *Life of Pachomius*, Pachomius and bishops negotiated their relationship so that Pachomius was the one who judged the monks (whether lay-monks or priest-monks) and the monastic community maintained its own rules, while matters of the priesthood (such as the ordination and appointment of clergy) were deferred to the bishop (Bohairic *Life of Pachomius* 25 and 68). Pachomius recognized the authority of the bishops to teach in conformity with the scriptures (Bohairic *Life of Pachomius* 37). According to the monastic hagiographer Besa, the bishops did not control Shenoute, the leader of White Monastery, but rather Christ controlled Shenoute (*Life of Shenoute*). Yet, Shenoute remained loyal to the orthodox bishop Cyril in his theological conflict with Nestorius. Shenoute's writings show that he is consistent with the theology of the orthodox bishops of the day.¹²⁶ The Alexandrian patriarch could normally rely on support from Shenoute and most monks in theological controversies, provided he supported Nicaean doctrines.¹²⁷ By the fifth century, the monasteries came to be closely aligned with the bishop of Alexandria.¹²⁸

teaching authority is not a given. In the monasteries, the elder or founder are looked to as the teaching authority.

¹²⁶ Moawad. "The Relationship of St. Shenoute," 107-19.

¹²⁷ Besa and D.N. Bell, *The Life of Shenoute* (CSS 73; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 17.

¹²⁸ The *Apophthegmata Patrum* also portrays monks aligned with the bishop of Alexandria. In one saying, visiting heretics made charges against the bishop of Alexandria to Poemen. Poemen gave them food and sent them on their way (Poemen 78). This passage implies Poemen was aligned with the orthodox bishop even while he shows hospitality to visitors. The appearance of the heretics – at least as remembered in the sayings – could reflect the conflict between different groups in Alexandria and Egypt and the desire to gain monastic supporters to the various groups. In this account Poemen sided with the bishop of Alexandria, but the offering of hospitality to his visitors may imply that such an allegiance was not absolute; acts of virtue (such as hospitality) trumped theological and political loyalty.

If the representations of the relationship between monks and clergy found in monastic literature are any indication of the monastic context, then the question of priestly authority would be pertinent for the textual community. By exploiting an existing tradition in which Isaac was a priest, *T. Isaac* addressed the relationship between monks and clergy. Isaac became a model for the textual community concerned with the monk-clergy relationship for early Egyptian monasticism.

1.2 The Tradition of Isaac as Priest

Since Genesis never assigned the title ‘priest’ to Isaac, it may come as a surprise to many twenty-first century readers that Isaac was portrayed as a priestly authority in *T. Isaac*. Yet, Isaac was portrayed as a priest in antiquity. Isaac sacrificed in Genesis and parabiblical accounts. The tradition of Isaac as priestly authority survives in a handful of Second Temple sources related to Levi’s priesthood.

In the Second Temple period, multiple sources evince a literary tradition concerning Levi and the priesthood. Robert Kugler calls it the Levi Priestly tradition. The Levi Priestly tradition proceeds from a retelling of Levi’s act of vengeance at Shechem in Genesis 34 to depict Levi as God’s ideal priest.¹²⁹ The three most prominent works in which the Levi Priestly tradition is present are *Aramaic Levi*, *Jubilees* (*Jub.* 30.1-32.9), and the somewhat later *Testament of Levi* (*T. Levi*). In addition, a few fragmentary texts from the caves near Qumran provide evidence for the Levi Priestly tradition.¹³⁰ Scholars

¹²⁹ R.A. Kugler, *From Patriarch to Priest: The Levi-Priestly Tradition from Aramaic Levi to Testament of Levi* (SBLEJL 9; ed. Adler; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 2.

¹³⁰ Representative of the scholarship surrounding the Levi Priestly tradition are: J.L. Kugel, "Levi's Elevation to the Priesthood in Second Temple Writings," *HTR* 86, no. 1 (1993); Kugler, *From Patriarch to*

rightly tend to focus on this material for discussing the patriarch Levi and the Levi priesthood. For my purposes, the Levi Priestly tradition's portrayal of Isaac was a major development of the tradition of Isaac in antiquity. The Levi Priestly tradition portrayed Isaac as the priest who precedes and teaches Levi about the priesthood. Yet, the Levi Priestly tradition did not make Isaac a priestly figure without exegetical support from Genesis. The reading of Genesis 26:25 below suggests how those responsible for the Levi Priestly tradition may have read it to develop their idea that Isaac was a priest.

The tradition of Isaac as a priest found in the Levi Priestly tradition seems to be on an exegetical trajectory from Genesis 26:25.¹³¹ In Genesis 26, following the appearance of Ha-Shem¹³² and the blessing upon Isaac, Isaac builds an altar and calls

Priest; J.C. VanderKam. "Isaac's blessing of Levi and his descendants in Jubilees 31," in *Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); J.C. VanderKam. "Jubilees' Exegetical Creation of Levi the Priest," in *From Revelation to Canon: Studies in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); M. Himmelfarb. "Earthly Sacrifice and Heavenly Incense: The Law of the Priesthood in Aramaic Levi and Jubilees," in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); M. Himmelfarb, *A Kingdom of Priests: Ancestry and Merit in Ancient Judaism* (ed. Rudermann; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); J.L. Kugel, *The Ladder of Jacob: Ancient Interpretations of the Biblical Story of Jacob and His Children* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006). See also, M.d. Jonge and J. Tromp. "Jacob's Son Levi in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and Related Literature," in *Biblical Figures outside the Bible* (eds. Stone and Bergren; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998); B. Halpern-Amaru. "The Naming of Levi in the Book of Jubilees," in *Pseudepigraphic Perspectives: The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 12-14 January, 1997* (eds. Chazon and Stone; vol. 31 of *Studies of the Texts of the Desert of Judah*, eds. Martinez and Van Der Woude; Leiden: Brill, 1999); M.d. Jonge. "Levi in Aramaic Levi and in the Testament of Levi," in *Pseudepigraphic Perspectives: The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 12-14 January, 1997* (eds. Chazon and Stone; vol. 31 of *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah*, eds. Martinez and Van Der Woude; Leiden: Brill, 1999); M.E. Stone. "Aramaic Levi Document and Greek Testament of Levi," in *Emanuel* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); J.C. Greenfield, et al., *The Aramaic Levi Document: Edition, Translation, Commentary* (SVTP 19; eds. Knibb, et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2004); G. Boccaccini, et al. eds. *Enoch and the Mosaic Torah: The Evidence of Jubilees* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009).

¹³¹ Kugel, "Levi's Elevation to the Priesthood," 19-20; VanderKam. "Jubilees' Exegetical Creation," 559.

¹³² I substitute "Ha-Shem" (the name) for the name of Israel's deity יהוה.

upon Ha-Shem at Beer-Sheba. In Genesis, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, functioned in the role of priest for their families.¹³³ The building of an altar and calling upon the name of Ha-Shem is what one does when performing the role of priest.¹³⁴ Like others in the ancestral and the primeval narratives of Genesis (Noah [Gen. 8:20], Abraham [12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9], and Jacob [Gen. 33:20; 35:7]), Isaac builds an altar to Ha-Shem.¹³⁵ As in the case of Abraham, Isaac calls upon the name of Ha-Shem after the altar is built.¹³⁶ The Hebrew קרא בשם יהוה is connected to cultic practice. In Gen. 4:26, it is used with respect to the Sethites' worship of Ha-Shem.¹³⁷ Likewise, it relates to cultic practices in Gen. 12:8.¹³⁸ As Claus Westermann states:

The invocation of the name of God then is the action which is the foundation of every act of divine service. Neither sacrifice nor oracle nor solemn divine service nor any other cultic act is conceivable or possible without the contact point which is effected by the invocation of the name. It is the beginning of everything – of lament and praise, jubilation and entreaty, refuge and trust.¹³⁹

¹³³ R.S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007), 193. Yet, according to Kugel, not all ancient interpreters thought Jacob was a priest. See Kugel, "Levi's Elevation to the Priesthood," 19-21.

¹³⁴ This seems to be the logic for the 'chain of priests' found in *Jubilees* and why, in *Jubilees*'s view, Jacob was not a priest.

¹³⁵ The Hebrew בנה מזבח is used to indicate the building of the altar in Gen. 8:20; 12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9; and 35:7. In Genesis 33:20, the hiphil of נצב is used instead of בנה.

¹³⁶ Neither Jacob nor Noah call on the name of Ha-Shem. In the account of Noah, Noah offers a sacrifice from the herds. In Jacob's case, he names the place where the altar was built.

¹³⁷ G.v. Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 112-13; C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (trans. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 339-41. Hossfeld and Kindl suggest it related to cult worship in general, not to a specific cult dedicated to the worship of Ha-Shem. F.L. Hossfeld and E.-M. Kindl, "קרא II. Communication at a Distance," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 13:113. Regardless, the phrase is related to cultic practice.

¹³⁸ Rad, *Genesis*, 162; W. Brueggemann, *Genesis* (ed. Mays; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 124.

¹³⁹ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 340.

For those responsible for the Levi Priestly tradition, then, when Isaac builds the altar and calls on the name of Ha-Shem, he was acting as a priestly figure. F.L. Hossfeld and E.-M. Kindl, however, appear to disagree with my conclusion. While they concur that the use of the idiom as an invocation of the deity is “foundational to all acts of prayer and worship,” they imply that the lack of an established cult with a professional priestly class means that the ancestors were not priests.¹⁴⁰ I am, however, not making a historical claim for the time of the ancestors. I am arguing that a reader in the Second Temple period (like the writers of the Levi Priestly tradition) would have understood the characters to have priestly traits. The narrative’s lack of an institutionalized priesthood left a void for the ancestors to fill. The narrative choice of the phrase יהוה בשם קרא invited the interpreter to view Isaac as a priest.

One final comment is in order for this passage. A unique aspect surrounding Isaac’s invocation of Ha-Shem’s name is found in the preceding verse. This is the first time in which the deity is identified as “the god of your father” (Gen. 26:24). This links the worship of Ha-Shem with a particular lineage, beginning with Abraham and continuing through Isaac, Jacob and his descendants.¹⁴¹ Thus a reader could interpret Genesis to be saying that Isaac was the priest for his family’s worship of Ha-Shem in his generation. All told, it seems safe to concur with James VanderKam and James Kugel who have pointed to Genesis 26:25 as the point where the exegetical motif of Isaac the priest arises.

¹⁴⁰ Hossfeld and Kindl, "קרא II.Communication at a Distance,"113.

¹⁴¹ T.E. Fretheim. "Genesis," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (ed. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 528.

While Genesis 26:25 may be the exegetical warrant needed for Second Temple period readers who treated Isaac as a priestly figure (such as the writers of the Levi Priestly tradition), the writer of *T. Isaac* did not build directly on the example of Genesis 26:25. Rather, he relied on the extra-biblical tradition of Isaac as a priestly figure. It is far more probable that the writer followed the exegetical trajectory found in the Levi Priestly tradition than he created *T. Isaac*'s priestly Isaac solely from Genesis or another tradition that more closely follows the biblical narrative.¹⁴² I can account for aspects of Isaac as a priest in *T. Isaac* that are not found elsewhere by appealing to the Levi Priestly tradition as a dialogue partner for *T. Isaac*.

The majority of scholars agree that *Aramaic Levi (ALD)* is to be dated to the late-third or the early-second century B.C.E.¹⁴³ This dating gives *Aramaic Levi* temporal priority over the *Book of Jubilees* and *T. Levi*. As the scholarly reconstruction of *Aramaic Levi* stands,¹⁴⁴ the narrative tells of Levi's life, including his elevation to the priesthood and his family life; almost all of the episodes are absent from the biblical narrative of Genesis. One of the main purposes of the work was to promote Levi as a priestly figure; *Aramaic Levi* shifted the priesthood back from Aaron's high priesthood or Zadok's high priesthood to Levi, and it grounded Levi's priesthood in the sacerdotal wisdom of the ancestral times.¹⁴⁵ In this narrative, Isaac appears as a key supporting player in the

¹⁴² Here, I am thinking of the work of Josephus (*Ant.* 1.267-277). While he presents Isaac as a priestly figure, he does not develop Isaac into a character that shares priestly wisdom with his descendants. Rather, Isaac's priestly characteristics are more incidental comments that indicate the cultural currency of Isaac as priest.

¹⁴³ For a discussion of the dating, Greenfield, et al., *The Aramaic Levi Document*, 19-22.

¹⁴⁴ I rely on the reconstruction found in Greenfield, et al., *The Aramaic Levi Document*.

elevation of Levi to the priesthood and Levi's training. Since Levi is the protagonist of the narrative, it is not surprising that Isaac is only a secondary character. Yet, the limited attention that Isaac receives reveals the patriarch to be a priestly character.

The relevant portion of *Aramaic Levi* begins after Levi narrates his visionary experience in which seven men in white robes make Levi a priest in the heavens (*ALD* 4). In *Aramaic Levi* 5, Isaac blesses Levi, Jacob tithes to Levi and invests Levi as the priest of God, and Isaac begins to teach Levi the law of the priesthood. The teachings include priestly teachings on purity (*ALD* 6), on the wood for the offering (*ALD* 7), on sacrifices (*ALD* 8), and on measures for wood, salt, fine flour, oil, wine, and frankincense (*ALD* 9). *Aramaic Levi* 10 concludes Isaac's commands to Levi and a final blessing for the priesthood.

The first time Isaac appears is when he blesses Levi (*ALD* 5.1). Within the narrative context of *Aramaic Levi*, Isaac's blessing of Levi should be understood as the outgoing priest blessing the next priest. Isaac is doing on earth what has already been accomplished in the heavens. Prior to the visit, Levi narrates a vision where seven white-robed men, apparently angels,¹⁴⁶ blessed Levi and ordained him into the priesthood in the heavens (*ALD* 4).¹⁴⁷ When Levi says, "And we went up to my father Isaac and he also blessed me thus" (*ALD* 5.1), Isaac is set up as the earthly counterpart to the ordaining

¹⁴⁵ As it survives, *Aramaic Levi* is an incomplete text, witnessed by fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls (1Q21, 4Q213, 4Q213a, 4Q213b, 4Q214, 4Q214a, and 4Q214b), manuscript fragments found in the Cairo Geniza (Cambridge ms T.S. 16, fol. 94 and Bodleian ms Heb c 27, fol. 56) and interpolated into a manuscript of the Greek *T. Levi* found at Mt. Athos (Monastery of Koutloumous, Cod. 39 [catalogue no. 3108]). For a discussion of the witnesses, Greenfield, et al., *The Aramaic Levi Document*, 1-6.

¹⁴⁶ Greenfield, et al., *The Aramaic Levi Document*, 145-46.

¹⁴⁷ Kugel, *The Ladder of Jacob*, 150.

angels in the heavens¹⁴⁸ and he provides the blessing for Levi's ordination into the earthly priesthood. Unlike the angels that bless and install Levi in the heavenly priesthood, however, Isaac does not install Levi as the priest at Bethel – Jacob invests Levi in the priestly clothes and consecrates Levi (*ALD* 5.2-5).

When Levi returns to his grandfather as a priest, Isaac shares the law of the priesthood with Levi. Isaac's instructions are given in a lengthy speech that is concerned with moral instruction as well as ritual instructions. By passing on the sacerdotal wisdom to his grandson, Isaac is fulfilling the task of one generation educating the next generation in the priestly knowledge. Isaac's role in respect to Levi's story should not be diminished. Kugel is correct when he says, "these instructions of Isaac's represent the transmission of divinely revealed knowledge, passed down from the time of Noah onward,"¹⁴⁹ Himmelfarb is also correct when she says, "Isaac's role as Levi's instructor implies that Levi is by no means the first priest for it requires that Isaac himself is a priest."¹⁵⁰ Kugel emphasizes that the revealed knowledge is important for the *Aramaic Levi*, not that the person who transmits it to Levi – Isaac – is a priest as well. Himmelfarb points out that only a priest could pass on the revealed knowledge, meaning Isaac must be a priest. Isaac's speech about the sacerdotal wisdom reveals a character that is intimately familiar with the law of the priesthood, a familiarity only a priest would have. In short,

¹⁴⁸ Kugel, *The Ladder of Jacob*, 247-48 n.20. Kugel takes this as evidence that the chain-of-priests motif is not crucial to *Aramaic Levi*. I do not see how this is the case. While Isaac's blessing may be a summary statement, it accomplishes the task of connecting Isaac's and Levi's priesthoods. Furthermore, the chain-of-priests motif is crucial for understanding why Isaac is the one to teach Levi the laws of the priesthood.

¹⁴⁹ Kugel, *The Ladder of Jacob*, 225 n.50.

¹⁵⁰ Himmelfarb. "Earthly Sacrifice and Heavenly Incense," 117.

Isaac's instructions to Levi characterize Isaac as a priestly figure who can pass along this wisdom to the next priest.

The second oldest work that evinces the Levi Priestly tradition is the *Book of Jubilees*.¹⁵¹ *Jubilees*'s narrative parallels the story found in Genesis and Exodus, but includes other content within its narrative. The Levi Priestly tradition material is an example of the other content that *Jubilees* incorporated into its narrative. The book relies on a chain-of-priests motif from the antediluvian period to the ancestral period until finally the priesthood is established with the line of Levi. The chain-of-priests motif helps to explain how the characters in Genesis were able to perform sacrifices prior to the giving of the law to Moses on Sinai: the sacerdotal wisdom had been given to the first priest, Adam, and passed on from one priest to the next until the chain is broken after Noah, but reestablished with Abraham – who received the sacerdotal wisdom in Enoch's and Noah's books (*Jub.* 21.10). *Jubilees* provides narrative expansions of Isaac's story that are not found in Genesis and not part of the Levi Priestly tradition.¹⁵² Even though *Jubilees* pays less attention to Isaac than to his father or his son,¹⁵³ *Jubilees*'s narrative

¹⁵¹ VanderKam dates *Jubilees* 160-150 B.C.E. See page 33 n. 92 above.

¹⁵² Kugel defines narrative expansion:

One of the most characteristic features of ancient biblical scholarship, whereby all manner of "extras" not found in the biblical text itself—additional actions performed by someone in the biblical narrative, or words spoken by him—are inserted in a retelling of the text by some later author or in a commentary upon it. Such narrative expansions are, by definition, *exegetical* because they are ultimately based on something that *is* in the text—an unusual word or turn of phrase that sets off the imagination of the exegete, or simply a problem in the plot that require resolution. Narrative expansions may be said to be based upon one or more *exegetical motif.

J.L. Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 276.

¹⁵³ J.C. Endres, *Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Jubilees* (CBQMS 18; ed. Karris; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1987), 21; VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, 45 and 59.

expansions offer additional instances in which Isaac plays a role, some of which highlight his priestly character through the speech of others, Isaac's own actions, and Isaac's words and interactions with other characters.

Isaac first appears to be a priestly figure in *Jubilees* 21:1-26, when the priest Abraham instructs Isaac concerning sacerdotal wisdom.¹⁵⁴ Abraham's words in *Jubilees* 21 are not *in toto* the instructions for everything with which a priest is to be concerned; yet, Abraham's instructions express, in general, sacerdotal wisdom: sacrifice, consumption of the priestly portion, wood for the fire of the altar, concern over blood, the danger of impurity, and so on. At the end of the instructions, Abraham blesses Isaac, passing down the role of priest to his beloved son. The speech, then, functions to characterize Isaac as the priest for his generation.

The following chapters of *Jubilees* portray Isaac as the new active priest. In *Jubilees* 22.1-7, Isaac presides over Abraham's family's celebration of the Festival of Weeks. Before his brother Ishmael, Isaac slaughters a sacrifice and offers it upon Abraham's altar in Hebron. Isaac also sacrifices the peace offering and directs his son Jacob to take a portion to the dying patriarch Abraham. In *Jubilees* 24.21-23, Isaac again performs the role of a priest. Isaac builds an altar, calls upon the LORD's name and offers a sacrifice. These two episodes demonstrate that *Jubilees* characterizes Isaac as a priest through Isaac's activities as sacrificer.

Finally, *Jubilees* portrays Isaac as the priest who blesses Levi as the next priest. Kugel suggests *Jubilees* 31 looks to answer how Jacob fulfilled his vow to the god of

¹⁵⁴ Kugler, in his study on the Levi Priestly tradition, points out that the instructions related to sacrifice are similar to, but also different from, those that Abraham gave to Isaac in the *Book of Jubilees* 21. Kugler, *From Patriarch to Priest*, 167.

Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 28:22.¹⁵⁵ One of the main issues for the ancient interpreter would have been that Jacob needed a priest to perform the sacrifice and to receive his tithe at Bethel. As Kugel and VanderKam suggest, Jacob was not considered a priest in *Jubilees*.¹⁵⁶ As a rule, *Jubilees* does not allow non-priestly figures to make sacrifices. Furthermore, a tithe cannot be fulfilled if it is not received by a priest. Thus, *Jubilees* shows how a priest was at Bethel with Jacob to accept his tithe. First, Jacob sets up an altar at Bethel (*Jubilees* 31.3a). Then, he calls for Isaac to come to Bethel (31.3b). This invitation seems to be Jacob's way to get the priest of God (Isaac) to officiate at Bethel, that is, to offer the sacrifice and to receive Jacob's tithe (31.1).¹⁵⁷ In *Jubilees*, Isaac refuses Jacob's request and invites Jacob to visit him (31.4).¹⁵⁸ Jacob brings Judah and Levi with him on the visit. Isaac has a spirit of prophecy descend upon his mouth that moves Isaac to bless Levi and Levi's descendants as a holy priesthood (31.12-17).¹⁵⁹ Afterward, Jacob tells Isaac about the oath he made to the LORD (31.24). Jacob tries to

¹⁵⁵ Kugel, "Levi's Elevation to the Priesthood."

¹⁵⁶ Kugel, "Levi's Elevation to the Priesthood.;" VanderKam. "*Jubilees'* Exegetical Creation." I would agree with both scholars since *Jubilees'* tendency is to elevate Jacob when the occasion arises; thus, it seems improbable that the narrator would fail to mention Jacob becoming or acting as a priest. While Jacob possesses the vestments of the priesthood and places them on to Levi, Jacob does not perform the act of sacrifice – Isaac does and Levi does. Nonetheless, *Jubilees'* opinion is not universal; other ancient interpreters portray Jacob as a priest. *Jubilees'* choice to not elevate Jacob to the priesthood likely rests on how its writers interpreted Genesis 31:54. Although Jacob sacrifices here, he does not build an altar nor call on the name of HaShem and, thus, those responsible for *Jubilees* may have interpreted it as slaughtering not as sacrificing. The parallel account in *Jubilees* has Jacob "prepare a banquet" (*Jub.* 29.7). Kugel, *The Ladder of Jacob*, 136.

¹⁵⁷ Kugel, *The Ladder of Jacob*, 140.

¹⁵⁸ According to Kugel's interpretation of *Jubilees*, when Genesis 35:7-8 notes that Deborah, Rebekah's servant, died at Allon-bakhut, it also suggests to ancient interpreters that Jacob must have visited his parents before their death at the end of Genesis 35. *Jubilees* 31 thus has the freedom to add Jacob, Levi, and Judah's trip to Hebron because it explains how Deborah was with Jacob's family at her death. Kugel, *The Ladder of Jacob*, 138-41.

¹⁵⁹ Isaac also blesses Judah and the royal line of Judah, but the priority is on Levi and his descendants.

put Isaac on a donkey to go to Bethel (31.26-27), but Isaac says he is too old and sends Rebekah and Deborah back with Jacob to Bethel (31.30) where Levi performs the role of the priest for the first time (32.1-9). I would suggest, in line with the arguments of Kugel and VanderKam, that since Isaac has already bestowed a priestly blessing on Levi, Isaac has passed down the priesthood and so he is not needed at Bethel – Levi can fulfill the role. The act of blessing signifies the handing down of the priesthood from one priest to the next. Although *Jubilees* 31 was primarily concerned with Jacob's fulfillment of his promise to the god of Abraham and Isaac, *Jubilees* participated in the Levi Priestly tradition's story of how the priesthood got from Isaac to Levi. *Jubilees* 31 is yet another example of Isaac as a priestly figure.

For *Jubilees*, Isaac's priestly status assists the broader narrative purposes of the story. Isaac is his generation's link that keeps the chain-of-priests from Adam to the Levitical priesthood intact. Isaac's priestly activities are not exceptional; he does not institute any of the major feasts like his father Abraham. His role, nonetheless, is important as transmitter of the priestly knowledge.

A third work from the Levi Priestly tradition is *T. Levi*.¹⁶⁰ *T. Levi* provides Levi's last words on his deathbed when he recounts episodes from earlier in his life, including his elevation to the priesthood. Once again, Isaac is a secondary character used to elevate Levi to the priesthood. In fulfilling this objective, Isaac emerges as a priestly figure. Isaac bestows the priestly blessing on Levi (*T. Levi* 9.2). He also provides the sacerdotal instructions to Levi. These instructions are explicitly connected with the instructions that Abraham gave to Isaac (*T. Levi* 9.12), suggesting a chain-of-priests motif as in *Jubilees*. Isaac's instructions in *T. Levi* 9 are quite brief in comparison to the instructions found in *Aramaic Levi*. The truncated instructions are concerned with sacrifices and moral behavior – fornication, particularly intermarriage, and its polluting effect are explicitly mentioned – suggesting both are connected to priestly living: priests are supposed to be morally fit, not just able to perform sacrifices properly. This is consistent with the rest of

¹⁶⁰ As some have observed, the Levi Priestly tradition found in *T. Levi* is comparable to that of *Aramaic Levi*, although the precise relationship between the Greek testament and the Aramaic document is open to some debate. Kugel, "Levi's Elevation to the Priesthood," 1-63; Kugler, *From Patriarch to Priest*, 171-200.

The comparable points are: Isaac instructs Levi in the laws of the priesthood albeit in a truncated account (*T. Levi* 9.6-14) and the mention of the blessing that Isaac bestowed upon Levi in Hebron prior to Levi officiating for Jacob's family at Bethel (*T. Levi* 9.2).

As it survives, *T. Levi* is part of the *T. 12 Patr.* The problems of provenance and dating related to *T. 12 Patr.* are well known. In its present state, it is a Christian work. However, it shows a remarkable continuity with Second Temple Judaism, and may be the product of this earlier period. De Jonge would suggest the collection is tentatively a second century C.E. Christian work. M.d. Jonge, "The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Christian and Jewish. A Hundred Years after Friedrich Schnapp," in *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian Christology and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Collected Essays of Marinus de Jonge* (vol. 68 of *Supplements to Novum Testamentum*, ed. Jonge; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 233-43. This is debated by others who would argue that the work is a Second Temple period Jewish work with later Christian redactions. Even if it is the later, the redacting activity results in a Christian work. For various perspectives on the debate, M.d. Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Study of Their Text, Composition and Origin* (25; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1953); J. Becker, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Testamente der Zwölf Patriarchen* (Leiden: Brill, 1970); H.D. Slingerland, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Critical History of Research* (SBLMS 21; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1977); H.W. Hollander and M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary* (SVTP 8; eds. Denis and de Jonge; Leiden: Brill, 1985); R.A. Kugler, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

the Levi Priestly tradition. Even in this brief chapter, *T. Levi* depends upon Isaac as a priestly character in order to elevate Levi to the priesthood.

A final work from the Second Temple period that is worth mentioning is *Testament of Qahat* (*T. Qahat*) since it also mentions Isaac as a priestly figure.¹⁶¹ This text, dated sometime after *Aramaic Levi* but before the late second century B.C.E., was found as a fragmentary text in Cave IV near Khirbet Qumran.¹⁶² The one fragment in which Isaac is mentioned (4Q542 1) evinces Isaac belonging to the chain-of-priests. In this fragment, Qahat is speaking his testament to his children warning against the dangers of giving their inheritance away to foreigners.¹⁶³ He exhorts them to keep separate and to maintain holiness and purity (4Q542 1 i 8-10). Qahat traces a lineage from his children through Qahat, Levi, Jacob, and Isaac to Abraham (4Q542 1 i 10-11) that connects the ancestors to the inheritance that Qahat's children will receive: "truth, good deeds, honesty, perfection, purity, holiness, and priesthood" (4Q542 1 i 12-13). In the second column, Isaac is not mentioned, rather he is present among the collective ancestors who had passed on the sacred writings to Levi, who passed them on to Qahat, who now passed

¹⁶¹ Some scholars have suggested that this work, along with *Visions of Amram*, is related to *Aramaic Levi Document* perhaps as part of a priestly trilogy. In fact, one scholar, J.T. Milik, went so far as to suggest this hypothetical trilogy as an alternative to the *Testaments of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* when the Apostolic Constitutions 6.16.3 refers to a work of the three patriarchs – although his suggestion is not generally accepted. Greenfield, et al., *The Aramaic Levi Document*, 31 n.121.

Greenfield et al. note the three works share "the association with the fathers of the priestly line." Furthermore, they suggest, "*ALD* is the oldest and the other two works might be related to it and perhaps even depend on it to some extent. *4QTestament of Qahat* and *4QVisions of Amram* might have been written on the pattern of *ALD* to legitimate the continuity of the priestly line and its teaching." Greenfield, et al., *The Aramaic Levi Document*, 29-31 (quotes on 29 and 31, respectively).

¹⁶² É. Puech, "Le Testament de Qahat en araméen de la grotte 4 (4QTQah)," *RevQ* 15, no. 1-2 (1991): 23-54.

¹⁶³ "And now, my sons, be careful with the inheritance that has been given to you. Do not give your inheritance away to strangers, nor your inheritance to assimilationists, lest you become low and degraded in their eyes, and they despise you; for then they will be alien to you and become your rulers" (4Q542 1 i 4-6).

them on to Amram (4Q542 1 ii 9-13). Even in a fragmentary condition, *T. Qahat* witnesses a tradition which treated Isaac as a priestly figure, a link in the chain-of-priests motif in which the priests passed down the sacerdotal wisdom from one generation to the next.

In a handful of works that survive from the Second Temple period, Isaac was portrayed as a priest. Isaac was the priest of his generation, who passed down the sacerdotal wisdom to the next priest. The textual community of *T. Isaac* remembered such a tradition of Isaac when the writer of *T. Isaac* portrayed Isaac as a priestly authority.

1.3 Isaac as Priestly Authority in *Testament of Isaac*

The writer of *T. Isaac* characterized Isaac as a priestly authority without assigning Isaac the title priest. Instead, the writer of *T. Isaac* portrayed Isaac as a priest through speech and actions. In *T. Isaac*, Isaac imparts wisdom to the priest of God and also speaks to Jacob about future sacrifices. Furthermore, Isaac's actions reveal him to be a priestly figure. Finally, the angel commands Isaac to pass on Abraham's wisdom – wisdom that I argue is related to priestly instructions.

The strongest example of Isaac as a priestly authority in *T. Isaac* occurs when the community gathers to the dying patriarch in *T. Isaac* 4 and the priest of God (ποῦνῆς μπνοῦτε) asks Isaac to tell him what to do.¹⁶⁴ Isaac responds with sacrificial instructions

¹⁶⁴ The priest of God is unnamed in *T. Isaac*. Given the similarities that the passage has with Isaac's instructions to Levi concerning the priesthood in *Aramaic Levi* and *T. Levi* (see below), I suggest that the priest of God in *T. Isaac* is based on Levi. At the 2009 Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Jesse Rainbow presented a paper that reached a similar conclusion independently of my research. In this paper, he referred to the priest as "Crypto-Levi." J. Rainbow. "Presbyopia, Purity, and Patriarchal Piety: The

(*T. Isaac* 4.9-22) and moral instructions (4.23-30) which demand purity in worship and in life. Isaac stresses the purity and holiness required to worship in the angelic service in which priests and monks will participate. His first words to the priest are “Keep your body holy, since the temple of God is situated inside it” (4.9). Immediately after commanding the priest to keep his body holy, Isaac exhorts him,

Keep yourself from the merriment of men, so that a word of anger will not come from your mouth. Keep yourself from speaking evil. Keep yourself from empty glory. Keep yourself from uttering a thoughtless word. Keep your hands from reaching out for anything that is not yours. (4.10-11)

The patriarch presents morality as an important aspect of what it means to be holy. Isaac also teaches that holiness and purity have a ritual aspect. Before offering an unblemished sacrifice the priest is to bathe himself (4.12). When standing at the altar the priest is not supposed to mingle thoughts of the world and thoughts of God (4.12). Through ritual bathing and single-mindedness of thought on God, the priest attains a state of holiness and purity that allows him to stand before God. Yet, Isaac also commands the priest to say a confession in which he asks God to “purify me with love because I am flesh and blood” and states that he is defiled and in need of purification, a sinner in need of forgiveness (4.14-16). In the confession, Isaac connects the need to be purified with the idea that humans, as flesh and blood creatures, are sinners in need of forgiveness. In *T. Isaac*, Isaac suggests that holiness and purity are related to morality as well as to ritual. Holiness and purity entails a separation from the ways of the world. As Isaac says, “Every person upon the earth, whether priest or monk (for after a long time they will love the life of holy retreat), will separate from the world and all of its wicked cares. And they

Priestly Status of Isaac in the Sahidic Testament of Isaac" (paper presented at Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting. New Orleans, November 23, 2009).

will join the holy service that the angels give to God in purity” (4.23). In the end, Isaac seems to intend by holy and purity, one’s relation to God (both morally and in a ritual sense) and a disconnection from the world and sinfulness.

The instructions that Isaac gives to the priest of God includes a prayer to say when offering a sacrifice that contains the chain-of-priests motif that goes back to Adam: “O God, the one who was with our father Adam and Abel and Noah and our father Abraham and Isaac his son; the one who was with Jacob; be with me and take my sacrifice from my hand” (*T. Isaac* 4.19). As I mentioned above, the chain-of-priests motif that links the primeval priesthood of Adam down to the ancestors and Levi and the Levitical priesthood through the righteous figures of Genesis was used in the Second Temple texts, such as *Jubilees*.¹⁶⁵ In *T. Isaac*, the chain begins with Adam and Abel, jumps to Noah and then to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, before ending with the “me” who is to say the prayer quoted above.¹⁶⁶

A second way the writer depicted Isaac as priestly authority was through Isaac’s actions. The patriarch’s actions in the narrative identify him as a priestly authority. He sacrifices for the sake of his family, acting as the familial priest:

He fasted until evening daily. He offered up on behalf of himself and his household a young animal for their soul. And he spent half of the night praying and blessing God. And he kept doing in this manner for 100 years. And he kept fasts which were drawn out over forty day periods each year,

¹⁶⁵ Kugel, “Levi’s Elevation to the Priesthood,” 17-19; Kugel, *The Ladder of Jacob*, 131-34. Nickelsburg and Stone also recognize that *T. Isaac* “may be drawing on the idea of a priesthood in the patriarchal and antediluvian periods.” G.W.E. Nickelsburg and M.E. Stone, *Faith and Piety in Early Judaism: Texts and Documents* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1991), 109.

¹⁶⁶ The answer to how Abraham becomes a priest despite the gap between Noah and Abraham is textual. In the Levi Priestly tradition, the priesthood of Abraham rests on his study and possession of the Books of Noah (cf. *Aramaic Levi* 10.10, *Jubilees* 21.10). Once the line of Levi is established, priestly books are passed down to demonstrate the proper line of priestly descent (cf. 4Q542 1 ii 9-13).

neither drinking wine nor eating fruit nor sleeping upon a bed. And he gave thanks to God and he prayed. (*T. Isaac* 4.1-6)

Isaac's activities as the family priest are associated with his ascetical practice. In *T. Isaac* 4.23,¹⁶⁷ Isaac joins priestly practice and monastic identity in ascetical practice. In Isaac's exhortations, ascetical practices seem to be part of priestly practice, which aligns with the actions reported about his life. Thus, in actions and in speech, Isaac blurs ascetic and priestly practices, rejecting the superiority of either over the other. Rather, both are holy services to be practiced in purity. In bringing the two practices together, Isaac asserts patriarchal authority over both priestly practice and monastic practice, two aspects of the holy service given to God.

Elsewhere in *T. Isaac*, Isaac discusses earthly and heavenly worship with Jacob. This discussion is a third instance where the narrative characterizes Isaac as a priestly authority. Prophesying the period after Christ's death and resurrection and the end of time, Isaac says:

And the sacrifices of the Christians will not cease until the completion of the age, whether in secret or in open. And the Antichrist will not appear as long as they offer sacrifice. Blessed is every person who does this service and believes in it, since the archetype is done in the heavens, and they will celebrate with the Son of God in his kingdom. (*T. Isaac* 3.18-20)

He prophesies the effectiveness of Christian sacrifices to prevent the appearance of the Antichrist. The patriarch connects the sacrificial service on earth with the service in the heavens. This connection reflects the seriousness of sacrifice on earth for those who participate in it. The earthly service requires a level of holiness and purity from the participants, as is reflected in Isaac's words to the priest of God in *T. Isaac* 4.9-30. In this

¹⁶⁷ Quoted above, pages 68-69.

prophecy, Isaac endorses the Eucharist (*T. Isaac* 3.16)¹⁶⁸ and Christian sacrifices. The specifics of Christian sacrifices are not stated at this point; later, however, in *T. Isaac* 6, Isaac reports various sacrifices the Lord endorses to commemorate Isaac's day (see Chapter Four below). The non-specificity in *T. Isaac* 3 may simply indicate that the writer of *T. Isaac* assumed the Christian textual community would know what sacrifices they performed. On the other hand, the writer of *T. Isaac* might have been encouraging the textual community to identify their sacrifices with the sacrifices mentioned elsewhere in *T. Isaac*.¹⁶⁹ I tend to think it is a little of both. The types of sacrifices endorsed elsewhere in *T. Isaac* are found elsewhere in early Christian monastic writings.¹⁷⁰ So, there is a sense in which the writer of *T. Isaac* did not need to state the obvious in this prophecy. At the same time, *T. Isaac* has enough hints that a newcomer to the textual community could easily identify the proper sacrifices. Since Isaac is understood to live forty-two generations before the incarnation of Christ, by putting these words into Isaac's mouth, the relatively new practices gain the authority of antiquity and are tied into the

¹⁶⁸ After these another forty-two generations will pass until the Christ comes. He will be born to a virgin who is pure, her name is Mary. He will spend thirty years proclaiming in the world. And after all of this is completed he will choose twelve people, and he will reveal to them his mysteries and *he will teach them about the type of his body and his true blood by means of bread and wine and the bread becomes the body of God and the wine becomes the blood of God* (*T. Isaac* 3.14-16).

¹⁶⁹ In *T. Isaac* 6, these include acts of piety and mercy: religious scribalism (writing works such as *T. Isaac*, hagiography, and Scripture), charity (feeding the hungry), physical austerity (restricting sleep), offering incense, reading or listening to a religious text. In *T. Isaac* 4, sacrificial practices include additional physical austerity (fasting, avoiding wine and fruit) and offering prayers and praise to God. While it is possible that the audience would have read *T. Isaac* 4 as an endorsement of animal sacrifices, the vagueness of the passage concerning what is sacrificed has the opposite effect. Other than being unblemished, the sacrifice is to be determined.

¹⁷⁰ Recently, David Frankfurter has argued persuasively that the category of sacrifice is not meaningful in ancient Egyptian religion if sacrifice is narrowly conceived as related to animal slaughter. Thus, when considering how the textual community would have understood the Greek-loan word *θυσια*, it would not primarily be understood as animal sacrifice. D. Frankfurter. "Egyptian Religion and the Problem of the Category "Sacrifice"," in *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice* (eds. Knust and Várhelyi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 75-93.

heritage of the biblical patriarchs who had worshipped God in a pleasing and appropriate manner as priests for their generations. At the same time, by attributing these words to Isaac, his reputation as a priestly authority is enhanced. By combining the priest and monk in the angelic worship of God, Isaac makes it possible for monks to enjoy worship and sacraments without an ordained priest's presence.

Finally, I propose that Isaac's conversation with the angel at the beginning of *T. Isaac*, in a dialogic conversation with existing patriarchal traditions, implies that the knowledge Isaac received from his father and he is supposed to pass on to his progeny is sacerdotal wisdom. The angel instructs Isaac to pass along the instructions Abraham had given to him: "Therefore, command the instructions to your sons, and the things which your father commanded you" (*T. Isaac* 2.27). What exactly these instructions were, *T. Isaac* does not report. Nonetheless, if the words that Isaac spoke to his audience in *T. Isaac* 4 are any indication, it is not a stretch to suggest that Abraham commanded Isaac things of a priestly nature. As Anitra Bingham Kolenkow points out, Genesis is silent about whether Abraham left any instructions for his son. Genesis 25 does not mention of Abraham giving Isaac his blessing. The rabbis understand Genesis 25 to mean that Abraham did not leave a testament or a blessing for Isaac. In addition, *Testament of Abraham* reflects the tradition when Abraham does not leave a testament for Isaac, even though the angel has instructed him to do so.¹⁷¹ Yet, there is at least another tradition in which Abraham leaves instructions for his son. Abraham leaves instructions for Isaac in *Jubilees* 21. This detail is also mentioned in *Aramaic Levi* 10.3 and *T. Levi* 9.12. In this

¹⁷¹ Kolenkow, "What is the Role of Testament in the Testament of Abraham?," 183; Kolenkow. "The Genre Testament and the Testament of Abraham," 139-52.

tradition, Abraham provides instructions to Isaac concerning sacrifices and other priestly issues. Moreover, the tradition shows that Abraham commanded Isaac to pass down the priestly wisdom. In *Aramaic Levi*, Isaac tells Levi, “For my father Abraham commanded me to do thus and to command my sons,” (*ALD* 10.3) as Isaac finishes his sacerdotal instructions to Levi. If Isaac is somewhat predictable for the audience in *T. Isaac* and the audience knew only of the dominant tradition that Abraham did not leave instructions, then one might have expected that Isaac would raise the issue that Abraham did not leave him instructions. Instead, Isaac accepts the angel’s exhortation without objection. This suggests that the writer of *T. Isaac* followed the trajectory of the tradition found in *Aramaic Levi*, *Jubilees*, and *T. Levi*, in which Isaac received sacerdotal wisdom from Abraham. Isaac does not object when the angel commands him to pass down what Abraham commanded Isaac because the priestly Isaac knew from the time that Abraham trained him that he was supposed to pass down the sacerdotal wisdom. If my reading of *T. Isaac* 2.27 is acceptable, then the verse also supports that Isaac is a priestly figure.

I now want to compare *T. Isaac*’s portrayal of Isaac as a priestly authority to the tradition of Isaac as a priest found in *Aramaic Levi*, *Jubilees*, and *T. Levi* to see what *T. Isaac* remembers about Isaac as a priestly authority (see Table 3). By looking at what *T. Isaac* remembers of the tradition of Isaac as a priest (especially his sacerdotal wisdom about purity; the obfuscation of other priests; and the shared participation in the heavenly worship by priests and monastics), I suggest that Isaac as a priestly authority for *T. Isaac*’s textual community was relevant for the monks in their quest for holiness and in relating to the priesthood. *T. Isaac*’s sacerdotal wisdom is less concerned with instructions for how to perform particular sacrifices than with purity in worship and in

life. Yet, Isaac also establishes Christian practices through his prophecy. *T. Isaac*'s portrayal minimized other members of the ancestral priesthood to focus on Isaac as priestly authority. The writer of *T. Isaac* obfuscated the identity of the priest of God, removing Levi and the Levitical priesthood from Isaac's tradition. Finally, Isaac sacrifices for his family, a role that only the writer of *T. Isaac* related to Isaac's asceticism. In *T. Isaac*, Isaac is the priestly example from the ancestral priesthood; he became the model of a new subjectivity for *T. Isaac*'s textual community.

Table 3: The Tradition of Isaac as a Priestly Authority

	<i>Aramaic Levi Document</i>	<i>Book of Jubilees</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Isaac</i>
Ritual Contents of Sacerdotal Wisdom	Yes	Yes ¹⁷²	Yes	Yes
▪ Bathing / Washing Hands & Feet	Yes – 3x before entering sanctuary (7.1-3); 1x after sprinkling blood (8.2)	Yes – 2x before entering; 1x after completion (21.16)	Yes – before entering; while sacrificing; after completion (9.11)	Yes – 1 x before approaching altar (4.9-30)
▪ Sprinkling Blood on Altar	Yes (8.1)	No	No	No
▪ Altar Wood	Yes (7.4-7)	Yes (21.12-14)	Yes – vague (9.12)	No
▪ Types of Offerings	No	Yes (21.7-9)	Yes (9.7, 13-14)	No
▪ No Blemish	No	No	No	Yes (4.12)
▪ Order of Parts	Yes (8.2-5)	Incomplete (21.7-9)	No	No
▪ Salting Sacrifice	Yes	Yes (21.11)	Yes (9.14)	No
▪ Fine Meal Offering	Yes (8.6)	Yes (21.7, 9)	No	No
▪ Libation Offering	Yes (8.6)	Yes (21.9)	No	No
▪ Incense	Yes – frankincense (8.6)	No	No	No

¹⁷² *Jubilees* narrates the episode when Abraham gave Isaac the priestly instructions, no mention is made of Isaac passing it down to Levi. For sake of comparison, however, Abraham's instructions are listed in the table.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Weights & Measures ▪ Treatment of Blood of Sacrifice 	Yes (8.7-9.18)	No	No	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Eating the Sacrifice 	Yes (10.6-9)	Yes – including prohibition of human blood as an offering (21.6, 17-20)	No	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thoughts of God not the World 	Not really (10.9)	Yes (21.10)	No	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prayer with Sacrifice 	No	No	No	Yes (4.12)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moral Contents of Sacerdotal Wisdom 	No	No	No	Yes (4.13-19)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Priest's Holy Seed 	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Warning about Sin (General) 	Yes – opposes intermarriage (6.4)	No	Yes – opposes intermarriage (9.9)	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Warning about Fornication & Harlotry 	Yes (6.1)	Yes (21.21-24)	No	Yes, but also lists chief sins: killing, fornication, defilement of the young, envy, anger, pride, schadenfreude, slander, lust (4.26-30)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Warning about Idolatry 	Yes (6.3)	No	Yes (9.9)	Yes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Keep Body Holy 	No	Yes (21.3, 5)	No	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Warning about Speech & Controversy 	No	No	No	Yes (4.9)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Temperance 	No	No	No	Yes (4.10-11)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Life of Prayer & Vigil 	No	No	No	Yes (4.21)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Life of Prayer & Vigil 	No	No	No	Yes (4.21-22)

▪ Renounce the World	No	No	No	Yes (4.23)
Isaac Received Sacerdotal Wisdom from Abraham	Yes (7.4; 10.3, 10)	Yes (21.1-26)	Yes (9.13)	Implied (2.27)
Isaac Offers Priestly Blessing to Levi	Yes (5.1; 10.11-14)	Yes (31.11-17)	Yes (9.2)	No
Isaac Shares Sacerdotal Wisdom with Levi / Priest	Yes (5.8-10.14)	No	Yes (9.6-14)	Yes

By comparing the content of the sacerdotal wisdom, I suggest that Isaac's instructions to the priest in *T. Isaac* would have been appropriate for a textual community interested in living holy lives like the ancestral priests. The tradition of Isaac as a priest shows that, in general, the priestly wisdom that Isaac gave or received is not exclusively concerned with sacrifice; there is also a concern with the moral behavior of priests. The attention that *Aramaic Levi* and *Jubilees* paid to more technical aspects of sacrifice (such as the wood, numerous times to wash, order of the parts of the sacrifice, and sacrificial measures), however, is lacking in *T. Isaac*.¹⁷³ Likewise, the earlier tradition's concern for the purity of the holy seed is absent from *T. Isaac*. Content wise, it appears that the writer of *T. Isaac* was not borrowing the specifics of its priestly instructions from the earlier tradition. Similar to *T. Levi*'s instructions, *T. Isaac*'s sacerdotal instructions reduce the specifics of the sacrificial details while retaining the gist of what Isaac instructs Levi on the laws of priesthood.

¹⁷³ *T. Isaac* does mention a pre-sacrifice washing but not to the extent found in the Levi Priestly tradition.

Isaac's instructions to Levi are found in *Aramaic Levi* 5.8-10.14. Before the instructions concerning sacrifice are given, Isaac exhorts Levi concerning his purity and the holiness of his seed (*ALD* 6.1-5). The concern in *Aramaic Levi* is for preserving the purity of the priestly line against the dangers of exogamous marriages.¹⁷⁴ Isaac instructs Levi to wash three times prior to offering a sacrifice (*ALD* 7.1-3) and once more following the sprinkling of the blood on the sides of the altar (*ALD* 8.2).¹⁷⁵ Then, he lists the woods to be used for the fire on the altar (*ALD* 7.4-7). Next, Isaac tells the order of the parts of the sacrifice to be placed upon the altar (*ALD* 8.1-4). He also discusses the requirement of the fine meal mixed with oil, wine, and incense to be offered (*ALD* 8.6). The patriarch provides sacrificial measurements (*ALD* 8.7-9.18) and shows concern for the blood of the sacrifice (*ALD* 10.6-10). Throughout *Aramaic Levi*, Isaac references Abraham as the source of his sacerdotal knowledge.¹⁷⁶ As a work written at the time of an active Second Temple, it is possible that the instructions may reflect practices or suggested practices for the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem.¹⁷⁷

In *Jubilees* 21, Isaac receives his priestly instructions from Abraham. Abraham begins with a concern about walking in God's way, such as hating idols, keeping God's commandments, and avoiding unclean things and the consumption of blood (*Jub.* 21.5-6). Then, Abraham speaks about the sacrifices (*Jub.* 21.7-9, 11). This is followed by instructions for eating the sacrifice (*Jub.* 21.10). Next, Abraham teaches Isaac about the

¹⁷⁴ Kugler, *From Patriarch to Priest*, 103.

¹⁷⁵ Kugler, *From Patriarch to Priest*, 103-104.

¹⁷⁶ Kugler, *From Patriarch to Priest*, 106.

¹⁷⁷ Himmelfarb. "Earthly Sacrifice and Heavenly Incense," 103-22.

wood to be used on the altar (*Jub.* 21.12-15). Abraham reminds Isaac to be clean, stipulating that Isaac wash his hands three times and to avoid blood on his clothing (*Jub.* 21.16-17). Abraham is concerned with the treatment of blood: blood is to be covered by earth; consumption of blood is prohibited; and gifts cannot be accepted for human blood (*Jub.* 21.17-20). Abraham returns to exhortations related to the sinful actions of humans and encouraging Isaac to follow the ways of God (*Jub.* 21.21-25).

In *T. Levi* 9, Isaac offers Levi's the sacerdotal wisdom that he received from Abraham. Isaac's instructions are a truncated version from those found in *Aramaic Levi* but *T. Levi* also contains details not found in the older account, when it adds that Isaac teaches Levi the laws of the Lord (in addition to the laws of the priesthood).¹⁷⁸ Isaac's teachings are in agreement with those that the angels showed Levi (*T. Levi* 9.6). The instructions concern the laws about sacrifices and offerings (*T. Levi* 9.7). Isaac also stresses a concern for purity and the avoidance of fornication (*T. Levi* 9.9). He encourages Levi to marry an appropriate non-Gentile wife (*T. Levi* 9.10). Isaac calls for Levi to bathe before entering the sanctuary, and to wash when offering the sacrifice and after the sacrifice is finished (*T. Levi* 9.11). Isaac lists, in summary fashion, the wood to be used, clean animals and birds for sacrifice, the choicest first fruits and wine, and the salting of sacrifices (*T. Levi* 9.12-14). While this passage is not concerned with sacrificial practices *per se* it is a continuation of the Levi Priestly tradition.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Kugler, *From Patriarch to Priest*, 207-209.

¹⁷⁹ Perhaps the lack of interest in sacrificial practices indicates *T. Levi* was written at a point in time when access to the cult was no longer possible or the community responsible for it was not concerned with sacrificial practices.

In *T. Isaac* 4, Isaac addresses issues of purity, moral behavior, practice, and sacrifice in his words to the priest of God. The patriarch exhorts the priest to keep his body holy for in it resides the Lord's temple. He also encourages the priest to avoid controversy, control his speech, and not to reach for things that are not his. Isaac talks about sacrifice: the sacrifice should be unblemished, the sacrificer should wash with water before approaching the altar, the priest's mind should be focused on thoughts of God not thoughts of this world, and be at peace with everyone. He tells the priest the prayer or confession to recite as the priest presents the sacrifice. The patriarch instructs the priest on temperance of food, drink, and sleep. Life, Isaac explains, should be spent in prayer, vigil, and recitation.¹⁸⁰ Isaac connects the service to God on earth with the angelic service, so priests need to renounce the world.¹⁸¹ He demands sinlessness. Furthermore, Isaac extends his advice beyond priests to include monastics in the service of God.

The writer of *T. Isaac* does not seem too worried with the earlier laws of the priesthood that relate to sacrifices, nor with the issue of intermarriage for the priesthood. Rather, the truncated rules of sacrifice are mentioned to allude to Isaac's priestly authority without the expectation that the community will sacrifice in a manner previously done in the temple. The technical content of the instruction on proper sacrifice for the priesthood is less important than the moral behaviors and the alternative practices of the priests and monastics. *T. Isaac's* sacerdotal wisdom, then, would be more relevant for a textual community that did not have an active temple cult like the priests of the

¹⁸⁰ Isaac models such a life. To anticipate Chapter 4, these practices are some of the ascetic performances the textual community adopts to become children of Isaac.

¹⁸¹ This idea is found in the Levi Priestly tradition as well. Cf. Jub. 31.

Second Temple period, and thus would benefit from the moral content of Isaac's instructions to the priest of God. In addition, intermarriage for the priesthood is a nonissue for *T. Isaac*. This lack of concern suggests *T. Isaac* emerges in a different context than the earlier Levi Priestly tradition (Egyptian monasticism context and Second Temple context, respectively).

The final three items in Table 3 provide elements related to the chain-of-priests motif to which I now turn. Isaac is the priest of his generation, who received his training in the priesthood from his father Abraham, blesses the next priest (Levi), and shares the sacerdotal wisdom with the next priest (Levi). As we have seen, Isaac received the sacerdotal wisdom from Abraham in *Aramaic Levi*, *Jubilees*, and *T. Levi*. In *T. Isaac*, the angel tells Isaac to pass on the instructions that his father Abraham gave to him. As I suggested above, these instructions are the sacerdotal wisdom that Isaac passes down later in *T. Isaac*. This reading makes sense of the passage by continuing the tradition of Isaac as a priest, especially the *Book of Jubilees*. Abraham instructs Isaac on the priesthood and, in turn, Isaac passes those instructions down to Levi (as found in *T. Levi* and *Aramaic Levi*). When the angel tells Isaac to pass down Abraham's instructions, *T. Isaac* implies Abraham was the previous priest to Isaac.

The chain-of-priests motif suggests that *T. Isaac* is on a trajectory from the earlier tradition. It follows, then, that the unnamed priest of God of *T. Isaac* is comparable to Levi in the Levi Priestly tradition. Just as Isaac instructs Levi about the laws of the priesthood in *Aramaic Levi* and in *T. Levi*, so too Isaac passes down sacerdotal wisdom to the priest of God in *T. Isaac*. There are differences as well. Unlike in the Levi Priestly tradition where Isaac blesses Levi, in *T. Isaac*, Isaac does not bless the priest of the Lord.

In addition, In *T. Isaac* 4.8 the unnamed priest arrives with the important men of the community. In the Levi Priestly tradition, Levi arrives with Jacob's family without reference to Isaac's pending death (*ALD* 5.6, *T. Levi* 9.5). The family stays with Isaac and Isaac trains Levi in the priesthood (*ALD* 5.8-10.14, *T. Levi* 9.6-14). Isaac's death was not immanent – within a day or two – in *Aramaic Levi* and *T. Levi*. The priest asks for advice in *T. Isaac*, whereas Isaac and Levi have a sacerdotal-didactic relationship in the Levi Priestly tradition. Despite these differences the priest of God in *T. Isaac* appears to derive from Levi as priest in the Levi Priestly tradition. By obfuscating the identity of Levi and his priesthood, the writer of *T. Isaac* shifted the focus to Isaac, and Isaac's sacerdotal wisdom. The generic identity of the priest of God makes Isaac, not Levi or any later priest, the priestly authority.

Perhaps the most obvious example of the chain-of-priests motif in *T. Isaac* is found in the names invoked in the sacrificial prayer (*T. Isaac* 4.19).¹⁸² (The other works discussed above do not include such a prayer.) The chain reaches back to Adam and concludes with the first person singular pronoun “me.” Along the way, a select group of priests who sacrificed to their god are mentioned: Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and “me”.¹⁸³ The presence of the chain-of-priests motif points out Isaac's priestly role. It connects Isaac's priesthood to the earliest times and to his own times.

¹⁸² Quoted above, page 69.

¹⁸³ Interestingly, this prayer includes Jacob as part of its chain-of-priests motif. As mentioned above, Jacob's priestly status is ambiguous in antiquity. While *Jubilees* does not view Jacob as a priest, *T. Isaac* does not make a similar distinction at this point. Here, at least, the *Testament of Isaac* suggests Jacob did have this status. Yet, the *Testament* does not present Jacob as a priest anywhere else.

The explicit presence of the chain-of-priests motif is odd because the writer of *T. Isaac* deemphasized it elsewhere.¹⁸⁴ Besides the prayer, the links of the chain-of-priest motif remain obscure. Isaac passes down advice to the priest of God, but the source of Isaac's instructions (that is, Abraham) is not mentioned explicitly in this transmission. When the angel tells Isaac to pass down the instructions of Abraham, no mention is made as to their content. Isaac appears to be the sole priestly authority of the wisdom he passes down to the priest of God (the next priest in the chain-of-priests). Nor is the priest of God mentioned by name. Furthermore, while Jacob is mentioned in the prayer, nowhere else is he treated as a priestly figure. In the rest of the narrative, the only named priestly figure is Isaac, pointing toward his priestly authority. These observations suggest that the writer of *T. Isaac* knew and adapted the chain-of-priests motif.

In comparison to the earlier tradition, one is left with the sense that the writer of *T. Isaac* wanted to elevate Isaac's priestly status, not to justify it. The chain-of-priests was previously used to justify Levi and the Levitical priesthood as the inheritors of the original priesthood from the time of Adam to Levi. The writer of *T. Isaac*, however, assumed that Isaac had the authority to pass on sacerdotal instructions; this point did not need justification. By shifting the focus from the other generations, the narrative raises the authority of Isaac's voice. Thus, while the angel hints that Isaac is to pass on Abraham's sacerdotal commands (*T. Isaac* 2.27), when Isaac gives the commands to the priest of God (*T. Isaac* 4.9-30), Isaac does not support his instructions by referring to

¹⁸⁴ I would hypothesize that the chain-of-priests motif survives in the prayer is because of the nature of the prayer to remind God of previous acceptable offerings and to remind the priest of appropriate sacrifices. In the liturgical context, it would be difficult to completely erase the other priests without losing the force of the prayer.

Abraham (as he did in *T. Levi* 9.12 or *ALD* 10.3). By passing the instructions on to the unnamed priest of God, Isaac offered sacerdotal wisdom to *T. Isaac*'s textual community that did not need to identify itself with the Levitical priesthood of the Second Temple period. Rather, *T. Isaac*'s textual community's practices and ethical teachings rested on Isaac's authority. The presentation of Isaac subordinates the priest of God to Isaac's priestly authority.

Lastly, one of Isaac's priestly roles is to offer sacrifices for the family in *T. Isaac* 4; this echoes the tradition of Isaac as a priest. Yet, Isaac's performance of sacrifice in *T. Isaac* takes place in a different context than the other works. For *T. Isaac*, Isaac's sacrifice is related to his ascetic life. In Genesis 26:25, as a result of a theophany, Isaac builds an altar and calls on the name of the Lord, which ancient readers may have interpreted as Isaac acting as a priest. In *Jubilees* 22.3-5, Isaac makes the sacrifices for his family on the feast of first fruits. *T. Isaac*'s portrayal of Isaac's performance of sacrifice within the ascetic context – instead of a theophany as in Genesis, or a celebration of first fruits as in *Jubilees* – may suggest a different understanding of sacrifice than the earlier tradition. Unlike *Jubilees*, *T. Isaac* is not concerned to show that the patriarchs celebrated feasts and festivals prior to the time of Moses. Rather, Isaac's sacrifices are related to his ascetic practice. Isaac's priestly example overlaps with his ascetic example. In *T. Isaac*, Isaac is priest and ascetic at the same time.

The blurring of Isaac's priestly role with his ascetic role, I suggest, was an important innovation in the way that *T. Isaac* remembered the tradition of Isaac as a priestly authority. Isaac is the priestly authority, who is able to instruct the priest of God in priestly matters, such as sacrifice but also questions of purity and holiness. Yet, Isaac's

priestly life is subordinated to his ascetic life and his exhortations show that priests and monastics both perform the holy service to God in their priestly and ascetic practices. Isaac's sacrifices are part of his ascetic practices and his sacerdotal concerns with purity and holiness were concerns for monastic communities. Isaac blurs the two roles and becomes the patriarchal authority for both. This image of Isaac would have resonated with an Egyptian monastic community negotiating its place within early Christianity. While Isaac is teaching the priest of God in *T. Isaac* a word about sacrifice, Isaac taught the textual community of *T. Isaac* about holiness and purity that could be applied to its context. In the process, the traditional sacerdotal wisdom was shifted away from providing sufficient details to complete a ritual sacrifice to discussing moral behavior and alternative practices to the sacrifices that the earlier works likely had in mind related to the Levitical priesthood and Second Temple practices. Isaac as a priestly authority shared with the priest of God sacerdotal wisdom relevant not just for priests, but for all who would live a life like Isaac.

In this remembered tradition, *T. Isaac* suggested that the monks look to Isaac as priestly authority concerning holiness and purity, instead of the priesthood of their age, since the priest of God also turned to Isaac for instruction. In *T. Isaac*, holiness and purity have a strong moral component (*T. Isaac* 4.9-30). Isaac's moral exhortations provide a rule for the monastic life. Just as monastic rules developed outside of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and thus opened a space for the monks to judge themselves, Isaac's rule would – in theory – have prohibited the bishop from interfering in the monastic community's self-regulation. From another perspective, since Isaac gave his wisdom about the holy service of the angels for both monastics and priests, it is possible that *T. Isaac*'s textual

community could have used his moral exhortations to evaluate the holiness of priests. By portraying Isaac as the priestly authority, then, *T. Isaac* established a rule for both priest and monk to meet. In the struggle for control of the monastic communities between the monastic leaders and the bishops, Isaac as priestly authority offered an alternative to either abba or bishop. Rather than one or the other having control over the monks' lives and practices, *T. Isaac* offered Isaac as the standard.

Finally, the textual community of *T. Isaac* could have looked to Isaac as a model to see if they lived an ascetic life that was superior to the priestly life, while also encouraging the clergy to adopt the monastic life while retaining their priestly status. Since Isaac is priest and ascetic, and imagines a time when priest and monk live together, Isaac could have become a model for the would-be priest-monk. Like Isaac, he could have maintained his role as priest while also living the ascetic life side-by-side with non-priest monastics.

The innovation of *T. Isaac* in its remembered tradition of Isaac as priestly authority was to relate it to Isaac's asceticism and the monastic life. The innovation made this aspect of Isaac's character relevant for the proposed textual community of *T. Isaac* in the fourth or fifth century Egyptian monastic context.

1.4 Conclusion

In *T. Isaac*, Isaac advises the priest for an envisioned community in which priests and monastics joined together, conforming to Isaac's teachings. As the sole priestly authority in *T. Isaac*, Isaac's words of sacerdotal wisdom became a set of praxes that the monastics of *T. Isaac*'s textual community adopted, or could have adopted, to develop

their religiosity and, as a result, also shaped their perceived identity as children of the patriarchs.

Isaac is the prominent priestly authority to whom the unnamed priest of God seeks counsel. Isaac's response is to encourage priests and monastics to holiness in their service to God and to shun the ways of the world. Moral behavior and repentance is emphasized over the technical details of sacrifice. Isaac's priestly praxis is intimately related to his ascetic life as well. The service of God by the priests and monks is akin to the angelic service in the heavens.

Isaac provided the textual community with a way to negotiate the monk-clergy relationship in early Egyptian monasticism. Isaac showed that both monk and clergy had access to God. Neither has authority over how the other lives; Isaac was the authority for both the monk and the clergy, as well as a guide for holiness and purity. Isaac was not afraid of monks becoming priests, because both priest and monk should live the life of retreat and separate from the world. Instead of an earthly worship, both monk and priest needed to join the angelic service.

The priestly aspect of Isaac's character in *T. Isaac* is not novel to *T. Isaac*. Isaac as priestly authority helped to support the theme of holiness in *T. Isaac*. The holiness that Isaac modeled and taught became a component of the new self that *T. Isaac*'s textual community sought to achieve when they read *T. Isaac* as an ascetical regimen. Isaac as priestly authority offered the first dimension of the three dimensioned model of the new self for *T. Isaac*'s textual community. Isaac defined the relationship between monks and clergy, bringing the two closer together. Isaac affirmed the importance of worship, including the celebration of the Eucharist, in the holy life. Isaac demanded purity in

worship and in life from the textual community since it was to participate in the angelic service of God. The remembered tradition of Isaac found in *T. Isaac* also includes Isaac as a sacrifice and Isaac as a blind ascetic. The next two chapters will explore these aspects of Isaac's character.

Chapter 2

Isaac as Sacrifice

Ancient Jewish and Christian interpreters of Genesis 22 developed the tradition of Isaac as sacrifice (or near sacrifice) and its significance for their respective communities. Many scholars discuss this tradition, but do not include *T. Isaac* in their conversation.¹⁸⁵ Likewise, scholars neglect the significance of Isaac as sacrifice in *T. Isaac*.¹⁸⁶ The

¹⁸⁵ While by no means an exhaustive list, scholars have not picked up on *T. Isaac* for the discussion of the sacrifice of Isaac also known as the Akedah in the rabbinic tradition. P.R. Davies and B.D. Chilton, "The Aqedah: A Revised Tradition History," *CBQ* 40, (1978): 514-46; S. Spiegel, *The Last Trial: On the Legends and Lore of the Command to Abraham to Offer Isaac as a Sacrifice, The Akedah* (trans. Goldin; New York: Behrman House, 1979); B.D. Chilton, "Isaac and the Second Night: A Consideration," *Biblica* 61, (1980): 78-88; J. Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac: A Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Light of the Aqedah* (94; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981); A.J. Saldarini, "Interpretation of the Akedah in Rabbinic Literature," in *The Biblical Mosaic: Changing Perspectives* (eds. Polzin and Rothman; *Semeia Studies*, ed. Via; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 149-65; A.F. Segal, "The Sacrifice of Isaac in Early Judaism and Christianity," in *The Other Judaisms of Late Antiquity* (vol. 127 of *Brown Judaic Studies*, ed. Neusner; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 109-30; J. Milgrom, *The Binding of Isaac: The Akedah, A Primary Symbol in Jewish Thought and Art* (Berkeley: Bibal Press, 1988); J.D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993); F. Manns ed. *The Sacrifice of Isaac in the Three Monotheistic Religions: Proceedings of a Symposium on the Interpretation of the Scriptures Held in Jerusalem, March 16-17, 1995* (vol. 41 of *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Analecta*; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1995); L. Kundert, *Die Opferung/Bindung Isaaks* (WMANT 78. Bd. 79. Bd.; 2 vols.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1998); J.L. Vaccaro, "Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Character of Isaac in Genesis 22" (University of Notre Dame, 1998); E. Kessler, "The Sacrifice of Isaac (the Akedah) in Christian and Jewish Tradition: Artistic Representations," in *Borders, Boundaries, and the Bible* (ed. O'Kane; vol. 313 of *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, eds. Clines and Davies; London: Sheffield Academic Publishing, 2002), 74-98.

¹⁸⁶ Even the more generous commentators on *T. Isaac* do not isolate the Akedah as important for the work. James, *The Testament of Abraham*; Gaselee, "Appendix Containing a Translation from the Coptic Version of the Testaments of Isaac and Jacob."; Kuhn, "The Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac."; Nagel, "Zur sahidischen Version des Testamentes Isaaks."; Gaguine, "The Falasha Version of the Testaments of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"; Kuhn, "An English Translation of the Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac."; Delcor, *Le testament d'Abraham*; Nordheim, *Die Lehre der Alten*, 150-160; Stinespring.

sacrifice reflects directly on the character of the patriarch in the narrative of *T. Isaac*. Through his sacrifice Isaac exemplifies the virtue of obedience. From this portrayal of Isaac, the monastic members of *T. Isaac*'s textual community learned the importance of obedience. The image of Isaac as sacrifice supported the textual community's identity as children of Isaac. This identity brought with it a set of praxes, acts of piety one ought to do in order to move beyond a nominal identity toward an identity that was embodied and animated.

In this chapter, I argue that Isaac as sacrifice was an important symbol for *T. Isaac*'s textual community and its identity as children of Isaac. Isaac as sacrifice provided the logic for becoming children of Isaac, as well as an example of the obedience required for members of the community. I begin with a discussion of the sacrifice of Isaac¹⁸⁷ for Egyptian monasticism. The sacrifice of Isaac was a common motif for Egyptian monks, sometimes related to becoming a part of the monastic community. Next, I will look at relevant parts of the tradition of Isaac as sacrifice in early Judaism and Christianity. Isaac modeled obedience in the tradition. Also Isaac's sacrifice resulted in God making a promise to Abraham and Isaac and their progeny. The tradition of Isaac's sacrifice sometimes focused on the promise given to the patriarchs on account of the sacrifice of Isaac. In Jewish tradition, Isaac's act was thought to benefit Israel in the future, especially the forgiveness of Israel's sins. In Christian tradition, Isaac's sacrifice was often an anti-type to Christ's crucifixion. Then, I will demonstrate the significance of Isaac as sacrifice

"Testament of Isaac," 903-11; Kuhn. "The Testament of Isaac."; Aranda Pérez. "Testament de Isaac," 227-303; Kuhn, "Coptic Testament of Isaac."

¹⁸⁷ In this chapter, I tend to use 'sacrifice of Isaac', 'Akedah', 'binding of Isaac' interchangeably, although Akedah as a label for the story is more properly a Rabbinic label not used in early Christian interpretations, which prefer the label 'sacrifice of Isaac'.

for the *T. Isaac*. In the *T. Isaac*, Isaac's sacrifice relies on the promise to establish the textual community as the children of Isaac, avoiding the typological interpretation of Isaac's sacrifice – while still relying on Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, to extend the possibility of being children of Isaac to non-ethnic Jews. *T. Isaac*'s textual community's identity as children of Isaac depended on their developing the virtue of obedience modeled on Isaac's obedience exemplified in his sacrifice.

2.1 The Egyptian Context and the Sacrifice of Isaac

Early Christians, not necessarily in monasteries, were exposed to the sacrifice of Isaac through various media. In catacomb art, the artists emphasized the theme of deliverance in depicting the sacrifice of Isaac.¹⁸⁸ In church mosaics, Isaac's sacrifice was associated with the offerings of Abel and Melchizedek. Isaac's sacrifice was mentioned during offertory prayers in early Christian liturgy. In this connection, Isaac's sacrifice was a biblical exemplar of the sacrifices (offering) that Christians made in worship. The Church commonly read Genesis 22 on the Thursday before Easter.¹⁸⁹ Early Christians, like their Jewish counterparts, were exposed to the sacrifice of Isaac (the Akedah) throughout their liturgical years, especially at significant moments.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ E. Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians, and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 159-61. Kessler engages the art found in the Catacomb of Callixtus, Catacomb of Priscilla and the Via Latina Catacomb in Rome. In Egypt, Kessler looks at the fourth century chapels of El Bagawat necropolis. Kessler points out that these artists are not concerned with interpreting Gen. 22 typologically like the Christian literary exegetes.

¹⁸⁹ Kessler. "The Sacrifice of Isaac (the *Akedah*) in Christian and Jewish Tradition," 84.

¹⁹⁰ Kessler, *Bound by the Bible*, 152.

The sacrifice of Isaac resonated with the early Egyptian monastics. In *Instruction Concerning a Spiteful Monk*, Pachomius encourages the monks to emulate the obedience of Abraham and the candor of Isaac at the sacrifice of Isaac.¹⁹¹ In the prologue of the Bohairic *Life of Pachomius*, the sacrifice of Isaac is mentioned along with the promise that the Word of God made to Abraham in Genesis 22:17-18.¹⁹² In the first reference, Isaac is a model of obedience and sacrifice for monks. In the second reference, God's promise resulting from the sacrifice of Isaac is part of the prehistory of the monastic movement. *T. Isaac* echoes these references in its remembrance of Isaac as a sacrifice.

Egyptian monastic culture also viewed Isaac as a model for monastic sacrifice. In an article about child sacrifice in early monastic writings, Caroline Schroeder shows that ascetic and monastic writers "revisit the stories of the sacrifice of Japhthah's daughter and the averted sacrifice of Isaac in order to impart ascetic wisdom to their readers."¹⁹³ Shenoute viewed Isaac as a model of sacrifice and monastic discipline. Monks were to endeavor to purify their bodies so that they might offer themselves as pure sacrifices to

¹⁹¹ "Be able to obey God like Abraham, who abandoned his country, went into exile, and with Isaac lived in a tent in the promised land as in a foreign country. He obeyed, humbled himself, and was given an inheritance; he was even put in trial and offered Isaac in sacrifice to God; and for that *God called him his friend*. <Take the candor of Isaac as an example too. When he heard his father, he submitted to him, even to being a sacrifice, like a gentle lamb>" (*Pach. Instr.* 1.2-3). Translation found in A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia. Volume Three: Instructions, Letters, and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples* (CSS 47; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1982).

¹⁹² "The Word of God, who made all things, came to our father Abraham and ordered him to sacrifice his only son. He said to him, I will shower blessings on you, I will make your descendants as many as the stars of heaven; all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in your seed" (Bohairic *Life of Pachomius* 1). Translation found in A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia. Volume One: The Life of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples* (CSS 45; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1980).

¹⁹³ C.T. Schroeder, "Child Sacrifice in Egyptian Monastic Culture: From Familial Renunciation to Jephthah's Daughter," *J ECS* 20, no. 2 (2012): 292.

God.¹⁹⁴ The monks followed Isaac's example of a willing sacrifice when they adopted the monastic life.

Monasteries contained paintings of Isaac's sacrifice that were connected to the ritual life of the monks.¹⁹⁵ The priest would perform the liturgy and celebrate the Eucharist in front of the monks, with such paintings behind the priest in view of the monks. Schroeder makes an interesting point that, "child sacrifice in monastic culture represented not merely an ascetic injunction to abandon family, but, perhaps more radically, an ascetic reproduction of monastic community and genealogy."¹⁹⁶ The ascetic life led to the renunciation of one's biological family. At the same time, the sacrificial activities of the ascetic life provided rituals through which the monastic community was able to construct and reinforce its communal identity, as an alternative family.¹⁹⁷ As I will show, for *T. Isaac's* textual community, the sacrifice of Isaac helped to develop a communal identity as children of Isaac.

2.2 The Tradition of Isaac as Sacrifice

I will begin this section by looking at Genesis 22. Then I will turn to the Second Temple tradition, Rabbinic tradition, and early Christian tradition, especially four influential church fathers from Alexandria. The interpreters of Genesis 22 display a

¹⁹⁴ Schroeder, "Child Sacrifice in Egyptian Monastic Culture," 297. Shenoute, *The Lord Thundered, Discourses 4*, GG, 27-28, in É. Amélineau, *Oeuvres de Shenoudi: Texte copte et traduction française* (2vols.; Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1907-1914), 2:141-42.

¹⁹⁵ Schroeder, "Child Sacrifice in Egyptian Monastic Culture," 269.

¹⁹⁶ Schroeder, "Child Sacrifice in Egyptian Monastic Culture," 269.

¹⁹⁷ Schroeder, "Child Sacrifice in Egyptian Monastic Culture," 298-302.

variety of exegetical interests. I will limit discussion to aspects of the tradition of Isaac as a sacrifice that are relevant to *T. Isaac*, Isaac's obedience and God's promise.

Genesis 22 contains an early account of the binding of Isaac and its significance. This account of Isaac's sacrifice provides nothing explicit concerning the thoughts of the characters Abraham and Isaac.¹⁹⁸ Isaac appears to be a passive sacrifice at this point in the tradition. Isaac is, for the most part, an object on which Abraham acts in order to pass or fail God's test.¹⁹⁹ In spite of Abraham also having a son, Ishmael, with Hagar earlier in Genesis, the narrative, through God's command to Abraham, characterizes Isaac as Abraham's only son, the one Abraham loves (Gen. 22:2).²⁰⁰ Isaac is called a *נֶעָר*, which carries the sense of a child, youth, or servant. Isaac carries the wood, taking over the task previously fulfilled by the ass. On their ascent up the mountain, Isaac asks Abraham about the ram, which shows he has a basic knowledge of sacrificial practices for the deity.²⁰¹ The text is silent concerning Isaac's thoughts (did he know what was about to happen to him?) and actions atop the mountain. The story focuses on Abraham as the actor, while Isaac, the son he was to sacrifice, disappears from view after the ram takes Isaac's place. Genesis does not mention what happens to Isaac after God's angel intervened. In Genesis 22, Isaac is, for all intents and purposes, an object used in God's

¹⁹⁸ E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation in Western Reality* (trans. Trask; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957), 1-20.

¹⁹⁹ Rad, *Genesis*, 239; Vaccaro, "Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Character of Isaac in Genesis 22" 45.

²⁰⁰ Vaccaro, "Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Character of Isaac in Genesis 22" 46.

²⁰¹ Vaccaro, "Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Character of Isaac in Genesis 22" 48.

trial of Abraham.²⁰² The Septuagint's version of Genesis 22 adds to the MT's depiction of Isaac. Isaac is no longer the 'only' (יחיד) son; rather, the translator has chosen 'beloved' (ἀγαπητός) (Gen. 22:2).²⁰³ Isaac is no longer identified with the same term as the servants (נעֲרָ in the MT but παιδάριον / παις for Isaac and servants, respectively, in LXX [Gen. 22:2]).²⁰⁴ The Greek gloss seems to suggest a more rational and mature, less child-like and passive, Isaac. Jody Lyn Vaccaro has observed that the translator made another significant choice in translating עֲקֵדָה (Gen. 22:9),²⁰⁵ a *hapax legomena*, as συμποδοειν, which carries with it a sense of the sacrifice being bound so that the animal being sacrificed cannot resist.²⁰⁶ Whether or not the translator intended it, the implication of the gloss for some readers could have been that Isaac was not a willing participant – and this was an implication many interpreters sought to counter in their retellings. In the Genesis 22 account, Isaac is not a model of obedience as he becomes elsewhere in the Isaac tradition. Isaac is an object that Abraham sacrificed; he is not yet an active participant in his sacrifice as he becomes in later accounts.

The elaboration of God's promise to Abraham in Gen. 22:15-18 is relevant for this chapter of the dissertation.

²⁰² Vaccaro, "Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Character of Isaac in Genesis 22" 52-53.

²⁰³ Vaccaro, "Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Character of Isaac in Genesis 22" 61-62; L.A. Huizenga, *The New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew* (NovTSup 131; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 79-80.

²⁰⁴ Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 80.

²⁰⁵ Akedah became the label that the Rabbis used for the event.

²⁰⁶ Vaccaro, "Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Character of Isaac in Genesis 22" 63.

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, “By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of your enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.

The promise interprets the event and articulates the significance of Isaac’s sacrifice for the future of Israel. Three times in Genesis, God makes a promise to Abraham. In comparison to God’s blessing to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 and Genesis 15, Genesis 22 shows developments in God’s promise to Abraham.²⁰⁷ God’s blessing in Genesis 22:16-18 is now absolute. God swears by Godself in Genesis 22:16, an act that is missing in the parallel passages.²⁰⁸ For the only time in relation to God’s blessing to Abraham בָּרַךְ is used in the infinitive absolute preceding the first person imperfect אֲבָרַכְךָ, emphasizing that God will surely bless Abraham (Gen. 22:17). The number of Abraham’s descendants continues to expand, from a great nation (Gen. 12:2) to numbering like the stars of heaven (Gen. 15:5-6) to numbering like the stars of heaven and the sand of the seashore (Gen. 22:17). God promises that Abraham and his descendants will be a great nation (Gen. 12:1-3), possess a great territory including the land of other peoples (Gen. 15:18-20), and, finally, possess the gates of their enemies (Gen. 22:17).²⁰⁹ Finally, God has shifted the fulfillment of the promise that the nations will be blessed in Abraham (Gen.

²⁰⁷ This paragraph relies on four developments that Huizenga observes in the blessing. Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 77-78.

²⁰⁸ Rad, *Genesis*, 243.

²⁰⁹ Von Rad thinks the idea that is captured in Gen. 22:17 is “still foreign to the basis of the promises.” Yet, the idea is not foreign, but rather it is a progression in understanding God’s promise to Abraham. These parts of the blessings highlight the expected power and strength of the descendants of Abraham. Rad, *Genesis*, 243.

12:1-3) to in Abraham's offspring (Gen. 22:18). In short, Isaac's sacrifice resulted in God making a promise to Abraham and his descendants, who will become a blessed, numerous, and powerful people. As we will see, Second Temple Jews, Rabbis, and early church fathers continued to interpret the promise that God made to Abraham and his descendants on account of Isaac's sacrifice for their communities.

The story in Genesis 22 provided much fodder for interpreters in antiquity. Isaac began to become an active participant in the story. The interpreters continued to interpret the significance of the act and God's promise. They included details about the story not found in Genesis. Although there was not one uniform exegetical tradition of the Akedah in the Second Temple period, common motifs regularly recurred in various combinations as later communities interpreted the Akedah. Based on surviving Second Temple period works, the following motifs appeared frequently:²¹⁰

1. Isaac is not a child but an adult.
2. Isaac is a willing sacrifice.
3. Isaac becomes the prototypical martyr who trusts in God.
4. The Akedah involves an actual sacrifice.
5. The trial demonstrates that both Abraham and Isaac were obedient to the command of God.

²¹⁰ I only include motifs relevant for my discussion in this chapter. Scholars have developed more detailed lists and discussions of the variety of exegetical motifs used by ancient interpreters of the Akedah than the limited list of exegetical motifs that I have included. J.L. Kugel, *The Bible as It Was* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), 165-78. Milgrom, *The Binding of Isaac: The Akedah, A Primary Symbol in Jewish Thought and Art*, 158-59. Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 75-128. Vaccaro, "Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Character of Isaac in Genesis 22". Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac: A Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Light of the Aqedah*. A.F. Segal, *The Other Judaisms of Late Antiquity* (BJS 127; ed. Neusner; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 109-30; Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*.

6. The Akedah provides soteriological benefit for Israel.²¹¹

Isaac became more than the passive object of sacrifice that he was in Genesis 22. In motif 1, Isaac is not a child but an adult. For example, Josephus explicitly stated Isaac's age in his retelling of Genesis 22: "Now Isaac was twenty-five years old" (*Ant.* 1.227).²¹² As an adult, Isaac is old enough to be aware of what is happening and to make his own decisions.

Such awareness by an adult Isaac is reflected in motif 2: Isaac is a willing sacrifice. Isaac knows that he is to be sacrificed, and goes along with it. We can see an example of this motif in the account of Isaac's sacrifice in Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*.

But the son said to the father, 'Hear me, father. If a lamb of the flock is accepted as sacrifice to the Lord with an odor of sweetness and if for the wicked deeds of men animals are appointed to be killed, but man is designed to inherit the world, how then do you now say to me "Come and inherit life without limit and time without measure"? Yet have I not been born into this world to be offered as a sacrifice to him who made me? Now my blessedness will be above that of all men, because there will be nothing like this; and about me future generations will be instructed and through me the peoples will understand that the Lord has made the soul of a man worthy to be a sacrifice'. (*L.A.B.* 32.3)²¹³

²¹¹ In discussion of later interpretations, I will refer to these motifs by number.

²¹² While others may not explicitly state Isaac's age, one can calculate that Isaac is fifteen in Jubilees. Vaccaro, "Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Character of Isaac in Genesis 22" 68. In midrashic traditions the rabbis identify Isaac's age as thirty-seven.

²¹³ Cf. *L.A.B.* 40.2; Judith 8.26; 4Q225; *Ant.*; 4 Macc.

In Judith 8.26, an allusion is made to Isaac's testing. Huizenga among others suggests that various elements in the surrounding passages seem to indicate that this is in reference to the Akedah. I am inclined to agree with Huizenga here about the allusion, not necessarily on his various reasons. The words and phrases used within the surrounding passage – 'sanctuary and temple and the altar' and 'fire' – may be suggestive, but are not conclusive. The mention of the sanctuary, temple, and altar is in the context of the present for Judith and its defense. I fail to see why this should indicate the Akedah for Isaac's trial any more than a temple related moment for one of the other patriarchs. That is, should the reader make a connection between the temple and Jacob's trial? The general motif of being tried by fire is not exclusive to the Akedah, so when it is found in Judith's speech I would be more inclined to here its use in this more generic sense rather than as an indication of Isaac's testing at the Akedah. It seems more likely that Judith

The motif of Isaac's willingness may have required an explanation as to why Isaac is bound. In a fragmentary work found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, Isaac requests his binding: "Isaac said to his father, 'Tie me well...'" (4Q225 2 ii 4).²¹⁴

Isaac's willingness to offer himself as a sacrifice also relates to motif 3: Isaac is a prototypical martyr who trusts in God. In the face of death that may come for being obedient and faithful to God, Isaac became the paradigmatic example for would-be martyrs. We can see this motif in 4 Maccabees.

'Remember whence you came, and the father by whose hand Isaac would have submitted to being slain for the sake of religion'. Each of them and all of them together looking at each other, cheerful and undaunted, said, 'Let us with all our hearts consecrate ourselves to God, who gave us our lives, and let us use our bodies as a bulwark for the law. Let us not fear him who thinks he is killing us, for great is the struggle of the soul and the danger of eternal torment lying before those who transgress the commandment of God. Therefore let us put on the full armor of self-control, which is divine reason. For if we so die, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will welcome us, and all the fathers will praise us'. (4 Macc. 13.12-17)²¹⁵

As prototypical martyr, interpreters implied that Isaac's sacrifice is a completed sacrifice (motif 4).²¹⁶ Their logic would have run something like this, if Isaac's sacrifice was not

does have a particular instance in mind for Isaac's testing that is known from Isaac's life – as she did for Jacob. Isaac has a limited number of those testing moments in the narratives that have survived from the Second Temple period. Judith's context necessitates that the testing of Isaac ought to be in the face of death in which Isaac confronts death head-on. This would seem to suggest an interpretation of the Akedah in which Isaac is also actively tested.

²¹⁴ This is a reconstruction based on a visible *kaph* and the targumic evidence of Isaac asking to be bound. J.C. VanderKam. "The Akedah, Jubilees, and PseudoJubilees," in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders* (eds. Evans and Talmon; Leiden: Brill, 1997); Vaccaro, "Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Character of Isaac in Genesis 22" 70-71; Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 90.

²¹⁵ Cf. 4 Macc. 7.9-19, 16.20-25. On 4 Maccabees' use of the Akedah for martyrdom, see Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, 187-89; Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 115-22.

completed, then Isaac could not be a prototype for martyrdom, since his life would not be lost in the offering of the sacrifice but only at the completion of the sacrifice.

In motif 5, Isaac demonstrates his obedience to God's command, a kind of obedience reminiscent of Abraham. We can see this in Josephus's account of Isaac's sacrifice.

Now Isaac was of such a generous disposition as became the son of such a father, and was pleased with this discourse; and said "that he was not worthy to be born at first, if he should reject the determination of God and of his father, and should not resign himself up readily to both their pleasures; since it would have been unjust if he had not obeyed, even if his father alone had resolved." So he went immediately to the altar to be sacrificed. (*Ant.* 1.232)

In this text, Josephus shifted the portrayal of Isaac from the passive victim to one in which he actively participates in his own sacrifice. Isaac became an exemplar for piety and devotion to one's deity.

Some Second Temple period interpreters understood the sacrifice of Isaac to provide soteriological benefits for Israel (motif 6). They interpreted it to justify Israel's election; because Abraham offered Isaac, God chose Israel.²¹⁷ The Akedah may have been read to suggest the sacrifice had expiating power.²¹⁸ Martyrdom became associated with vicarious atonement. Given the motif of Isaac as protomartyr, it follows that the

²¹⁶ Although not explicit, the martyrdom motif of 4 Maccabees suggests such a conclusion. Vaccaro, "Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Character of Isaac in Genesis 22" 77; Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 118. Furthermore, *LAB* implies that blood was shed. Vaccaro, "Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Character of Isaac in Genesis 22" 115.

²¹⁷ In *LAB* 18.5, Balaam receives the following reply from God, "Is it not regarding this people that I spoke to Abraham in a vision, saying 'Your seed will be like the stars of the heaven', when I lifted him above the firmament and showed him the arrangements of all the stars? And I demanded his son as a holocaust. And he brought him to be placed on the altar, but I gave him back to his father and, because he did not refuse, his offering was acceptable before me, and *on account of his blood I choose them* [Israel]." (emphasis added). Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 106.

²¹⁸ Vaccaro, "Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Character of Isaac in Genesis 22" 76.

Akedah became associated with Israel's atonement. Yet, there is not a clear understanding of the efficacy of Isaac's sacrifice.²¹⁹

To sum up the tradition of Isaac as sacrifice in the Second Temple period, exegetes portrayed Isaac as an active participant (the willing sacrifice, prototypical martyr, and example of obedience to God's command) in the Akedah. This portrayal of Isaac continued to develop in both the rabbinic and Christian interpretations. Some Second Temple period interpreters began to give voice to the efficacy of Isaac's sacrifice – it may have had soteriological benefits and offered atonement for Isaac's progeny. After the destruction of the temple, interpretations of the efficacy of Isaac's sacrifice developed along two trajectories – one on which Isaac's sacrifice is beneficial for his progeny and one on which Isaac's sacrifice does not offer benefit because only Christ's sacrifice is effective.

After the Second Temple period, two primary groups inherited traditions concerning the Akedah. The two movements that come to be known as Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity interacted with and reflected on Genesis 22 and related accounts as they continued to develop the story. Neither group developed it in a vacuum; there is evidence of borrowing and responding to each other's interpretations of the binding of Isaac.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Huizenga concludes,

Soteriological ramifications are varied, and, on balance, the import of the Akedah for merit, atonement, and expiation in most documents remains ambiguous at best. 4 Maccabees presents the most robust doctrine of vicarious, expiatory atonement, but even there, the connection to the Akedah is implicit: the martyrs' deaths atone, while Isaac is their patriarchal paradigm. The other document which presents a consistent, coherent and discernible soteriology is Jubilees, and there it is purely an exemplarist soteriology focused solely on the figure of Abraham; neither Isaac nor expiation play any role.

Huizenga, *The New Isaac*, 128.

²²⁰ This statement applies not just for literary works, representations of the Akedah in early Jewish and Christian artwork are another example of the relationship between the two developing traditions. M. Bregman. "The Riddle of the Ram in Genesis Chapter 22: Jewish-Christian Contacts in Late Antiquity," in

These communities drew on earlier traditions to interpret the Akedah for their own contexts.²²¹ Isaac was central to the Jewish – Christian debate about the significance of the Akedah.²²² As Alan Segal says, “both in some ways use the Akedah tradition to explain the founding events of their communities.”²²³

A review of the rabbinic literature does not reveal *the* rabbinic interpretation of the Akedah, but many. Anthony Saldarini’s article, “Interpretation of the Akedah in Rabbinic Literature,” however, suggests there are certain themes around which interpretations of the binding of Isaac was clustered.²²⁴ Two themes that Saldarini identifies are relevant for this chapter.

1. The person of Abraham and Isaac – The Rabbis highlight the character of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham’s “character and extraordinary behavior as well as other positive qualities are detailed and praised.” Isaac’s voluntary participation is sometimes also mentioned.²²⁵

The Sacrifice of Isaac in the Three Monotheistic Religions: Proceedings of a Symposium on the Interpretation of the Scriptures Held in Jerusalem, March 16-17, 1995 (ed. Manns; vol. 41 of *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Analecta*; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1995). Kessler. "The Sacrifice of Isaac (the Akedah) in Christian and Jewish Tradition."

²²¹ Segal’s words seem somewhat appropriate: “Both the Christian and the rabbinic exegesis of Isaac’s sacrifice are based upon the pre-Christian, Jewish exegetical tradition, which stressed martyrdom. But each community makes its own significance of the tradition from its own experiences and also listens to what the other community is saying to an extent. . . . These traditions did not develop under the pressure of literary transmission alone. They are the result of the response of exegetes to specific events within their community.” Segal, *The Other Judaisms*, 130.

²²² Kessler, *Bound by the Bible*, 111. In Kessler’s examination of the sources, he argues that “the most significant exegetical encounters are most commonly found in those interpretations that deal with the figure of Isaac” (124).

²²³ Segal, *The Other Judaisms*, 130.

²²⁴ Saldarini. "Interpretation of the Akedah," 149-65.

²²⁵ Saldarini. "Interpretation of the Akedah," 150. Saldarini sees the Rabbis discussing the persons of Abraham and Isaac in: b. *Sanh.* 89b; m. *Sanh.* 11.5-6; y. *Ta'an* 2.4 (65d); b. *Roš Haš.* 16a; *Gen. Rab.* 55.1-

2. The future good effects of the Akedah for Israel – Various events in which God redeems Israel in the past are explained as the benefit of the merits gained from Abraham and Isaac’s actions in the Akedah.²²⁶

In rabbinic writings, Isaac takes his place as a full-fledged patriarch.²²⁷ He is a willing participant in his sacrifice. Isaac, in a few retellings, is actually sacrificed. Finally, his actions are meritorious and benefit Israel.

In their reading of the Akedah, rabbinic interpreters transformed Isaac from Genesis 22’s passive participant to an active participant with full awareness that he is to be sacrificed.²²⁸ Isaac is old enough to make mature decisions (cf. motif 1).²²⁹ He asks to be bound so as not to accidentally be blemished and disqualified.²³⁰ His actions are the actions of a righteous person.

By the third century, the Rabbis viewed Isaac as an active member in the test – that is, Isaac’s sacrifice. Isaac’s willingness and active involvement is on display in b. Sanh. 89b. Here, Ishmael’s taunting causes Isaac to insist that he would be willing to

6; *Gen. Rab.* 56.1-4; *Gen. Rab.* 56.5-8; *Gen. Rab.* 56.9-11; *Gen. Rab.* 57.1-4; *Mek.* 1.57; *Mek.* 1.99; *Sipre Deut.*

²²⁶ Saldarini. "Interpretation of the Akedah," 150. Saldarini sees the theme of future good effects for Israel in: m. *Ta'an.* 2.4; t. *Soṭah* 6.5; m. *Soṭah* 5.4; y. *Ta'an* 2.4 (65d); b. *Roš Haš.* 16a; b. *Ta'an* 16a; *Gen. Rab.* 56.1-4; *Gen. Rab.* 56.5-8; *Gen. Rab.* 56.9-11; *Gen. Rab.* 57.1-4; *Mek.* 1.57; *Mek.* 1.99.

²²⁷ Cf. *Gen. Rab.* 1.15.

²²⁸ Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, 198-99. Of course, Second Temple interpreters have already begun to transform Isaac into an active participant as seen in some of the motifs discussed above (especially, motif 6, 7, and 9).

²²⁹ The typical age given for Isaac is thirty-seven. See, *Geneziah Manuscripts of the Palestinian Targum*, Exod. 12.42; *Frg. Tg.* Exod. 15.18 (p) and 12.42 (v); *Tg. Neof.* Exod. 12.42; *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen. 22.1; *Exod. Rab.* 1.1; *Gen. Rab.* 55.4, 56.8.

²³⁰ This may be similar to the fragment of 4Q225 2 ii 4 quoted above, but note the reconstruction of that fragment is based on the targumic and midrashic evidence for Isaac being bound.

sacrifice himself if God asked.²³¹ The story is also found in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Genesis 22.²³² Prior to the Lord commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (the start of the story in Genesis 22), Ishmael challenges Isaac concerning his circumcision on the eighth day,

Isaac answered and said, "Behold, today I am thirty-seven years old, and if the Holy One, blessed be He, were to ask all my members I would not refuse." These words were immediately heard before the Lord of the world, and at once the Memra of the Lord tested Abraham ... (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen. 22.1)²³³

This motif took another step in developing Isaac as an active character in the Akedah.

While Isaac does not yet know he is to be sacrificed, this prologue shows Isaac's willingness (cf. motif 2). Isaac is able to demonstrate his own obedience to God (cf. motif 5).²³⁴ By placing Ishmael and Isaac's discussion before the announcement of the test, the Targum insinuated that Isaac will be a willing, obedient and active participant in the story that follows it.

We can also see Isaac's willingness in *Sipre Deuteronomy*, where Isaac is a voluntary participant who binds himself to the altar.²³⁵

... 'And with all thy soul', as did Isaac, who bound himself upon the altar, as it is said, 'And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son'. (*Sipre Deut.*, Piskas 32)

²³¹ Saldarini. "Interpretation of the Akedah," 155.

²³² Although Tg. Ps.-J. dates to the seventh century C.E., "R. Levi, a third century Palestinian Amora, knew an abbreviated form of it (b. Sanh. 89b)." R. Hayward, "The Present State of Research into the Targumic Account of the Sacrifice of Isaac," *JJS* 32, (1981): 131.

²³³ Cf. Genesis Rabbah 55.4

²³⁴ G. Vermès, "Redemption and Genesis XXII: The Binding of Isaac and the Sacrifice of Jesus," in *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies (Studia Post-Biblica)*, ed. De Boer; Leiden: Brill, 1961), 197.

²³⁵ Saldarini. "Interpretation of the Akedah," 161. cf. Tanna Dede Eliyahu, *ER* 7.

Here, R. Meir applied Isaac's self sacrifice as an example to imitate as he explained what it meant to love the Lord with all one's soul in Deuteronomy 6:5.²³⁶

We also find an active Isaac in the Targums of Genesis 22.²³⁷ In the Targums, Isaac consents and, in accordance with biblical rules prohibiting sacrifices of blemished animals, requests to be bound so that he will not become blemished if he accidentally struggles against Abraham.²³⁸

And Abraham said: "From before the Lord a sheep will be prepared for a burnt-offering, my son; and if not, then you are the sheep;" and they both walked together whole heartedly – Abraham to slaughter, and Isaac to be slaughtered. [verse 9 missing] And Abraham extended his hand and took the knife to slaughter Isaac his son; Isaac began by saying to Abraham his father: "Father, bind my hands well, lest at the moment of my distress I shall jerk and confuse you, and your offering be rendered disqualified, and we come to be thrust into the pit of destruction in the world to come..." (Frg. Tg. Gen. 22.8 and 10)²³⁹

The Rabbis developed the significance of God's promise in response to Isaac's sacrifice. Relying on their concept of "merit of the fathers" (*zechut avot*), where acts by the biblical patriarchs earned merit that has theological benefit for future generations of Israel, the Rabbis viewed Isaac's active role as an act by which he garnered merit for future generations. In some rabbinic versions of the Akedah, Abraham offers a prayer in

²³⁶ Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, 192.

As part of R. Meir's exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:5, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob each provide an example to explicate the meaning of "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart [Abraham (citing Isa. 41:8)], and with all of your soul [Isaac (citing Gen. 22:9-10)], and with all of your might [Jacob (citing Gen. 32:11)]."

²³⁷ *Geneziah Manuscripts of the Palestinian Targum*, Gen. 22.8; *Tg. Neof.* Gen. 22.8; see also, *Lam. Rab.* Proem 24; *Gen. Rab.* 55.4, 56.4, 56.8; *Pesiq. Rab.* 48.3.

²³⁸ Vermès, "Redemption and Genesis XXII," 193-227. cf. Tanna Dede Eliyahu, *ER* 25; Tanna Dede Eliyahu *EZ* 2;

²³⁹ Cf. Targum Neofiti 1 of Genesis 22.10; Targum Ps.-J. of Genesis 22.10; *Pesikta de Rab Kahana Sup.* 1.2.

which he requests that the Lord have mercy on Isaac's children on account of Abraham offering Isaac as a sacrifice.

I beg mercy from before You Lord God that when the children of Isaac my son enter into an hour of oppression, that You will remember for them the binding of Isaac their father, and release and forgive them their sins and rescue them from all distress (*Frg. Tg. Gen. 22.14*).²⁴⁰

The prayer did not make explicit who had earned the merit, Abraham the sacrificer, or Isaac the willing sacrifice.²⁴¹ Other passages, however, credited Isaac with merit for his willing sacrifice.²⁴² For the Rabbis, the merit of Isaac was sufficient for God to keep God's covenant with the Jews and treat them with mercy.

The Targums on Leviticus located Isaac and God's covenant as occurring on Mt. Moriah, the site of Isaac's sacrifice in Genesis 22.

Then I will remember with mercy the covenant which I established with Jacob at Bethel, and also the covenant which I established with Isaac on Mount Moriah; and I will also remember the covenant which I established with Abraham between the pieces; and I will remember the land of Israel with mercy. (*Tg. Ps.-J. Lev. 26.42*)²⁴³

Thus, Isaac's actions at the Akedah established a covenant between Isaac and God that will benefit Israel. God will remember the covenant with mercy.

The Rabbis identified the future good benefits that Israel enjoyed from Isaac's meritorious actions at the Akedah with acts of redemption and salvation by God throughout Israel's history.²⁴⁴ Saldarini states,

²⁴⁰ Cf. *Gen. Rab.* 56.9, 56.10; *'Ag. Ber.* 38.

²⁴¹ *Pirqe R. El.* 31.

²⁴² Tanna Dede Eliyahu, *EZ* 2; *'Ag. Ber.* 72; *Ruth Rab.* 2.2; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* Sup. 1.20.

²⁴³ Cf. *Tg. Neof. Lev.* 26.42; *Tg. Micah* 7.20; *Lev. Rab.* 29.7.

²⁴⁴ Cf. *Gen. Rab.* 56; *Lam. Rab.* Proem 24; *Pesiq. Rab.* 28.1, 40.5.

Various acts of redemption and salvation by God in the past and expected in the future are attributed by the rabbis to the merit gained by Abraham through his willingness to sacrifice even his son, at God's command. This is part of the larger doctrine of the merits of the father.²⁴⁵

I would add to this that the merit of Isaac was often related to Isaac's role in the Akedah.²⁴⁶ The effects of the merit of the fathers provided numerous benefits to the patriarchs' children, including forgiveness of sins and the redemption.²⁴⁷ Geza Vermes identifies in the midrashic literature five benefits Israel already achieved on account of Isaac's merit from the Akedah: the firstborn sons were saved at the first Passover; the Israelites were saved at the Red Sea; Jerusalem was saved from destruction in the time of David's census; forgiveness was given to Israel for the Golden Calf; and Israel was delivered from Haman's massacre.²⁴⁸ In sum, "The merits of his sacrifice were experienced by the Chosen People in the past, invoked in the present, and hoped for at the end of time."²⁴⁹ The Rabbis came to interpret moments of redemption from their biblical history in light of the merits of Isaac and the Akedah. The notion of the merit of the fathers was significant for the rabbinic understanding of the Akedah and its benefit for Israel.

²⁴⁵ Saldarini. "Interpretation of the Akedah," 150.

²⁴⁶ Individually, Isaac's merits are seldom mentioned. A. Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of Merits in Old Rabbinical Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1968), 76.

²⁴⁷ Kessler, *Bound by the Bible*, 64-65. Kessler observes that the Rabbis emphasis on *zecu' avot* for the Akedah is the counterpart to Christian typological interpretations of the Akedah (112). These two come to form the dominant trajectories for the two groups, yet Kessler sees the two resulting from exegetical encounters between Rabbis and Church fathers.

²⁴⁸ Vermès, "Redemption and Genesis XXII," 206-207. See, *Tg. Canticles* 1.9, 1.13, and 2.17; *Eccl. Rab.* 10.9; *Tg. of Chron.*, 1 Chron. 21.15; *Piqre R. El.* 45; *Frg. Tg. Deut.* 1.1; *Tg. Ps.-J. of Deut.* 9.19; *Tg. Esth. II* 5.1, 6.1; *Pirqe R. El.* 50.

²⁴⁹ Vermès, "Redemption and Genesis XXII," 208.

One of the popular rabbinic understandings of the binding of Isaac was that it expiates Israel's sins and maintains Israel's relationship with their God. For example, we can see this understanding in a midrash on the Song of Songs 1:14. Here, the Rabbis interpreted why Song of Songs states, "My beloved is to me like a cluster of henna blossoms..."

My Beloved is unto me as a cluster of henna. Cluster refers to Isaac, who was bound on the altar like a cluster of henna: because he atones for the iniquities of Israel. (*Song Rab.* 1.14.1)

This reading relied on the common root letters כפר for henna (כופר) and he atones (מכפר).

The Rabbis interpreted the verse in light of Genesis 22 and the idea that the Akedah results in the atonement of Israel's sins. For the Rabbis, Isaac's sacrifice atoned for Israel's sins; as Arthur Marmorstein observes,

Of all the fathers, Isaac has the greatest share in bringing about the atonement of Israel's sin. The sacrifice of Isaac is referred to in this connexion [sic.] numerous times in the prayers and homilies in these centuries, although the merits of Isaac are very seldom alluded to in the Agadah.²⁵⁰

The concept of the merit of the fathers became a key for the Rabbis' understanding the Akedah. Isaac's sacrifice gains merit for Israel and atones for Israel's sins.

Himmelfarb's work on ancestry and merit in early Judaism points to this idea as well.²⁵¹ She understands the claim of the *'Amidah* – the central prayer of each service dating to rabbinic times – to be "Jews are assured of salvation not because of their own deeds but of the piety of their ancestors."²⁵² Himmelfarb goes on to say,

²⁵⁰ Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of Merits*, 149.

²⁵¹ Himmelfarb, *A Kingdom of Priests*.

The 'Amidah is not the only place the liturgy invokes Israel's ancestors to guarantee salvation. The inclusion of the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) in the morning liturgy reflects the same idea.²⁵³

Himmelfarb makes an important point about Jews and Christians clashing in their interpretations of Genesis 22, "The prayer following the recitation of Genesis 22, then, serves to appropriate the crucial event for the Jews as physical descendants of the patriarchs."²⁵⁴ Himmelfarb is correct in seeing this Jewish interpretation of Genesis 22 as a claim to a biological lineage to the ancestors; the Akedah's good effect for the redemption and salvation of Israel is for biological Israel and not for Christians.²⁵⁵

Early Christian writers also interpreted the sacrifice of Isaac for their communities. Their interpretations show continuity and innovation with the Second Temple tradition of Isaac as sacrifice. The common Christian development read Isaac as an anti-type of Christ and the entire episode as a type of Christ's sacrifice. Sometimes,

²⁵² Himmelfarb, *A Kingdom of Priests*, 177. The 'Amidah begins, "Blessed are you, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, the great, mighty and revered God, God most high, generous and kind, owner of all things. You remember *the pious deeds of the patriarchs, and in love will bring a redeemer to their children's children*, for your name's sake, O King, Helper, Savior and Shield, Blessed, O Lord, the Shield of Arbaham" (emphasis added).

²⁵³ Himmelfarb, *A Kingdom of Priests*, 178.

²⁵⁴ Himmelfarb, *A Kingdom of Priests*, 178. One should also note the following study of the Akedah's use in the Jewish liturgy, F. Manns. "The Binding of Isaac in Jewish Liturgy," in *The Sacrifice of Isaac in the Three Monotheistic Religions: Proceedings of a Symposium on the Interpretation of the Scriptures Held in Jerusalem, March 16-17, 1995* (ed. Manns; vol. 41 of *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Analecta*; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1995), 59-67.

²⁵⁵ I would go further and suggest that the merit of the ancestors as benefit for biological Israel is one of the reasons that the Rabbis have a certain amount of anxiety when it comes to dealing with the convert. It is difficult to fit non-biological members of the community into the language of physical lineage. Even when a Gentile converts to Rabbinic Judaism, the convert does not attain full equality with a biological Jew. Because some of the prayers and declarations require identifying with the ancestors as 'our fathers' (as in m. Bikkurim 1.4-5), the Rabbis discuss when a convert (and their offspring) may say 'our' instead of 'your' or 'the fathers of Israel'. Intermarriage between Jews, Gentiles, and converts is also an issue for Rabbis, since it complicates who is and is not considered a biological Jew. For the anxiety of the rabbis concerning converts and their relation to the ancestors, see S.J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (HCS 31; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 198-340.

Isaac became a model for the ethical model for the Christian community. But, the sacrifice of Isaac was not sufficient for the Christian notion of salvation; salvation could only be accomplished through Christ's sacrifice.

*1 Clement*²⁵⁶ shows continuity with the Second Temple tradition.²⁵⁷ In this text, Isaac is a willing victim.

Isaac gladly allowed himself to be brought forth as a sacrifice, confident in the knowledge of what was about to happen. (*1 Clem.* 31.3)

Following the motif of Isaac as a willing victim known from Second Temple literature (cf. motif 2), Clement employed Isaac as an example for the audience to follow.

In an early witness to what becomes the dominant early Christian interpretation of the sacrifice of Isaac, the *Epistle of Barnabas* interpreted the sacrifice using an Isaac – Christ typology. *Barnabas* argued that in the Christ event the audience had “been perfected so as to become heirs of the Lord's covenant” (*Barn.* 6.19). Then the letter expounded on the suffering of the Son of God (*Barn.* 7). In explaining the crucifixion, the author identified Isaac's sacrifice as the type fulfilled in Christ:

because he [the Lord] himself was about to offer the vessel of the Spirit as a sacrifice for our own sins, that the type might also be fulfilled that was set forth in Isaac, when he was offered on the altar. (*Barn.* 7.3)

The Isaac-Christ typology was prominent in the early Christian tradition. *Barnabas* marks an early witness to the typology Christians developed when they connected the sacrifice of Isaac to the crucifixion of Christ. A look at some of the interpretations of Genesis 22

²⁵⁶ *1 Clement* is an occasional letter from Clement of Rome to the churches in Corinth. It is typically dated at the turn of the first and second century C.E.

²⁵⁷ In addition, *1 Clement* discusses Abraham as an example for offering Isaac as a sacrifice, which is also present in the Second Temple period interpretations as well as in Hebrews 11:39-40 and James 2:20-22.

by Alexandrian church fathers will help to show the development of the tradition of Isaac as sacrifice along the early Christian trajectory.

Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, and Cyril of Alexandria demonstrate how the Alexandrian tradition interpreted the sacrifice of Isaac from the second to fifth centuries C.E. According to tradition, Clement – not to be confused with Clement of Rome associated with *1 Clement* – and Origen were both early heads of the catechetical school that came under the auspices and control of the Alexandrian papacy.²⁵⁸ Athanasius and Cyril were bishops of Alexandria during critical times for defining Christian orthodoxy in Egypt. While theological controversies and socio-political shifts occurred between the times of Clement and Cyril, it is still possible to see a trajectory of the interpretation of Genesis 22 that focused on the Isaac – Christ typology, a trajectory of interpretation that would have found its way into the early monastic communities of Egypt.

The monks would have been aware of the Alexandrian interpretations through their interactions with the Alexandrian see, as well as some of their previous education and the circulation of these interpretations in texts. A generally positive, and mutual, relationship between the Alexandrian papacy and the monastic communities in Egypt was important for the bishop of Alexandria's power.²⁵⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 1, the bishop could rely upon the support of monastic leaders and monks to support him in

²⁵⁸ It seems unlikely that there was a single catechetical school in the early history of the Alexandrian church. A.v.d. Hoek, "The "Catechetical" School of Early Christian Alexandria and Its Philonic Heritage," *HTR* 90, no. 1 (1987): 59-87.

²⁵⁹ S.J. Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and Its Leadership in Late Antiquity* (Popes of Egypt 1; Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004); S.J. Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice: Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt* (OECS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

controversies as long as he was viewed as Nicene. The monastic communities also benefitted from the relationship through ecclesiastical patronage. The Alexandrian bishops, or their emissaries, occasionally visited the monasteries. The bishops sent encyclical letters to the monks to inform them of theological matters, such as the setting of Easter. Monastic leaders and monks occasionally visited Alexandria. Through the cultivation of the relationship, the monastic communities would have access to the Alexandrian fathers' biblical interpretations. In addition, more recent investigations into the backgrounds of monks suggest that their backgrounds were not simply from the peasantry, but many probably had some level of education and religious knowledge.²⁶⁰ These monks would have brought with themselves knowledge of the Alexandrian interpretative traditions. In short, the monks would have had an opportunity to be exposed to the ideas of these interpreters.

While a typological reading is the most common way that early Christians read the sacrifice of Isaac, the Alexandrian exegetes displayed some variety in their readings. They showed a familiarity with earlier motifs and build upon them. In general, their interpretations reflected a concern with some themes relevant to the discussion in this chapter.²⁶¹

1. Isaac's sacrifice is a typology. Isaac is a type of Christ; Isaac is a type of the economy of salvation; and Isaac is a type of a Christian (who has received the gift of salvation).

²⁶⁰ See P. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (TCH 6; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); S. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert*.

²⁶¹ Like exegetes in the Second Temple period and the Rabbis, the church fathers developed additional themes that are not pertinent to the discussion in this chapter.

2. The promise related to Isaac's sacrifice. The promise of Abraham applies to Christians. Isaac's sacrifice renews the promise. Christ fulfills the promise.
3. Isaac (as well as Abraham) is a moral example for Christians.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215) read Isaac's sacrifice typologically. Clement discussed the sacrifice of Isaac in *Paedagoges* and *Stromata*. In *Stromata*, Clement depicted Isaac as having a special relationship with God. Isaac is one of the Hebrew prophets, moved by the power and inspiration of God (*Strom.* 2.21). Clement found Isaac's relationship with God to be exceptional since the Bible calls God 'the God of Isaac'. The special relationship accounts for why God selected Isaac as a consecrated sacrifice (*Strom.* 2.5). On this final point, Clement built a typological interpretation of the sacrifice of Isaac.

Accordingly all those above mentioned dogmas appear to have been transmitted from Moses the great to the Greeks. That all things belong to the wise man, is taught in these words: "And because God hath showed me mercy, I have all things." And that he is beloved of God, God intimates when he says, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." For the first is found to have been expressly called 'friend'; and the second is shown to have received a new name signifying 'he that sees God'; while Isaac, God in a figure selected for himself as a consecrated sacrifice, to be a type to us of the economy of salvation. (*Strom.* 2.5.20.2.2-4)

Isaac's sacrifice is a type of Christ's crucifixion, the saving act of Clement's economy of salvation. In patristic theology, the term economy expressed a sense of good order and arrangement of affairs.²⁶² In Isaac's sacrifice, God demonstrates the careful sequencing of events for how God will bring salvation in the time of Christ.

²⁶² J.J. O'Keefe and R.R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 37.

In *Paed.* 1.5, Clement developed an etymological interpretation of Isaac's name (laughter, rejoicing, etc.) as an example for proper godly childlikeness. Clement read Genesis 26 – when Abimelech spies Isaac and Rebekah fooling around even though Isaac told Abimelech that Rebekah was his sister – allegorically to demonstrate merrymaking in Christ. Isaac (whose name here means playful) and Rebekah (whose name means submission) are engaged in the joy like that of the children of Christ. Clement employed Isaac and Rebekah as an example for those adopted by God. Interestingly, merry-making was not sufficient in itself; rejoicing must be tempered with submission. Isaac's salvation in Genesis 22 is a type of the rejoicing that Christians have in response to their salvation. Reflecting on this typology, Clement blended the Isaac of Genesis 22 to the Isaac of Genesis 26.

It is possible to interpret the meaning of the inspired word in still another sense: that it refers to our rejoicing and making merry because of our salvation, like Isaac's. He rejoiced because he had been saved from death; that is why he played and rejoiced with his spouse, as we with our helpmate in salvation, the Church. (*Paed.* 1.5.22.2.3)

The ancestors were examples for the early Christians to follow. Isaac's salvation at his sacrifice and his subsequent life were a type of the salvation one received through Christ and of the subsequent life that Christians ought to lead.

Clement interpreted Genesis 22 typologically to connect Isaac's sacrifice to the Christians' experience. The above discussion shows two examples: Clement's typological interpretation of the sacrifice of Isaac portrayed Isaac as a consecrated sacrifice that Clement read as a type of the economy of salvation. Clement also read Isaac's salvation from death as a type of the salvation that Christians experience. A third and more popular typology is Isaac as a type of Christ (*Paed.* 1.5). Unlike the economy of salvation

typology, which emphasized the ordered act, the Christ typology focused on the participant. Clement's typology is more developed than the type of Christ interpretation that *Barnabas* showed.

Isaac is another type, too (he can easily be taken in this other sense), this time of the Lord. He was a son, just as is the Son (he was the son of Abraham; Christ, of God); he was a victim, as was the Lord, but his sacrifice was not consummated, while the Lord's was. All he did was to carry the wood of his sacrifice, just as the Lord bore the wood of the Cross. Isaac rejoiced for a mystical reason, to prefigure the joy with which the Lord has filled us, in saving us from destruction through His blood. Isaac did not actually suffer, not only to concede the primacy of suffering to the Word, but also to suggest, by not being slain, the divinity of the Lord; Jesus rose again after His burial, as if He had not suffered, like Isaac delivered from the altar of sacrifice. (*Paed.* 1.5.23.1.3)

Clement saw similarities between Isaac and Christ: both are sons, carry the wood, are victims, and rejoiced. Also, Clement suggested that the Christ typology is represented in Isaac's deliverance from death as well. Yet, Clement articulated an important difference between the two: Isaac's sacrifice was not a true sacrifice. Since Isaac's sacrifice was not consummated, Isaac did not suffer, and thus it was not the true sacrifice that Christ's crucifixion was. This difference was a key point for the Christian exegetes. Since Isaac's sacrifice was not completed, and Isaac did not suffer, it could not have the same effect as Christ's sacrifice. In Clement's interpretation of the sacrifice of Isaac, Isaac was a type of Christ. Isaac's sacrifice prefigured Christ's, but it was ultimately not effective for salvific purposes.

Origen (c. 185 – 254) followed Clement as exemplar of the Alexandrian school of interpretation. While his relationship with the Alexandrian papacy was tenuous, Origen's influence endured in Egypt and its monastic communities. Origen continued the typological interpretation of the binding of Isaac found in Clement. At the same time,

Origen's interpretation of Isaac contains elements not found in Clement. Origen's interpretation of the sacrifice of Isaac is clearest in his *Homilies on Genesis* that contains two homilies focused on Genesis 22. In *Hom. Gen. 8*,²⁶³ Origen stated that Abraham knows that the binding of Isaac is a prefiguration of a future truth (the crucifixion of Christ and Christ's resurrection). In addition, Abraham has the foreknowledge that Christ is to come from his seed (*Hom. Gen. 8.1*). Like Christ, Isaac carries the wood of his sacrifice. Like Christ, Isaac is a son. Like Christ, Isaac is victim. And – in what appears to be an innovation of the typological interpretation – like Christ, Isaac is his own priest. Isaac carries his own wood, a task that Origen understood to belong to the priesthood.

That Isaac himself carries on himself “the wood for the holocaust” is a figure, because Christ also “himself carried his own cross,” and yet to carry “the wood of the holocaust” is the duty of a priest. He himself becomes both victim and priest. But what is added also relates to this: “and they both went off together.” For when Abraham carries the fire and knife as if to sacrifice, Isaac does not go behind him, but with him, that he might be shown to contribute equally with the priesthood itself. (*Hom. Gen. 8.6*)

Yet, Origen emphasized the difference between the two: Isaac was a mortal son who was not put to death while Christ was an immortal son delivered to death by God (*Hom. Gen. 8.8*). In the end, the ram that is sacrificed in Isaac's place is the type of Christ as well – for it is the actual offering.

But this ram no less also seems to represent Christ. Now it is worthwhile to know how both are appropriate to Christ, both Isaac who is not slain and the ram which is slain. (*Hom. Gen. 8.9*)

²⁶³ Crouzel opines that *Hom. Gen. 8* is “One of Origen's finest homilies in terms of literary merit.” It offers direct appeal to the audience on the literal and moral planes but also delicately suggested an allegorical interpretation. H. Crouzel, *Origen* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 44.

In concluding the homily, Origen exhorted the members of his community to beget a son like Isaac in the spirit. I take this to mean that Origen intended for his audience members to focus on cultivating the joy and peace to transform their souls. He set forth Isaac as the example of the ideal son, described as the joy connected with virtue and wisdom (*Hom. Gen.* 8.10). Origen viewed Isaac as an example for his community to emulate – a perspective similar to the one in *T. Isaac* for how the textual community might become children of Isaac. In this homily, then, Origen continued the interpretative traditions found in Clement: Isaac is an example for the community and a type of Christ.

Origen's second homily on Genesis 22, *Hom. Gen.* 9, focused on the promise to Abraham's progeny. Origen discussed why God made multiple promises to Abraham. For Origen, God makes the promise to Abraham in Gen. 15 for Abraham's children according to the flesh and the promise is associated with the rite of circumcision. Origen thought that the promise in Gen. 22 is for Abraham's other children.

...because he [Abraham] was to be the father also of those who "are of faith" and who come to the inheritance through the passion of Christ, the promise which should apply to that people which is saved by the passion and resurrection of Christ is renewed at the time, no less, of the passion of Isaac. (*Hom. Gen.* 9.1)

For Origen, the promise to Abraham applied to those who were saved in Christ's passion and resurrection. Isaac's sacrifice was a renewal of the promise. Christ's sacrifice was the fulfillment of the promise. Origen supported his exegesis with reference to Paul's earlier interpretation of "your seed" to mean Christ.²⁶⁴ Origen argued allegorically that the promise was fulfilled through Christ's sacrifice. In Origen's view, the presence of the gospel and faith in Christ in Gentile cities fulfilled the promise of God to Abraham to

²⁶⁴ Gal. 3:16

occupy enemy cities in Genesis 22:17 (*Hom. Gen. 9.3*). The enemy (Gentile) cities were occupied because they had accepted the gospel and Christ. In Origen's interpretation, the Gentiles became children of Abraham through the work of Christ. It was Christ's sacrifice and not Isaac's sacrifice that was effective in fulfilling the promise and making Gentiles into children of Abraham.

Athanasius (c. 296 – 373), the patriarch of Alexandria, wrote about the sacrifice of Isaac in his Sixth Festal Letter. He also recognized the parallel between the sacrifice of Isaac and the crucifixion of Christ.

For thus, the patriarch Abraham rejoiced not to see his own day, but that of the Lord; and when he was tried, by faith he sacrificed Isaac, and offered up his only begotten son – he who had received the promises. And, in offering his son, he worshipped the Son of God. And, being restrained from sacrificing Isaac, he saw the Messiah in the ram, which was offered up instead as a sacrifice to God. The patriarch was tried then through Isaac. (*Ep. fest. 6*)

In talking about the binding of Isaac, Athanasius identified only the ram as a sign of the Messiah. Isaac was not actually sacrificed, but was saved through the ram's sacrifice.

Athanasius explained that Abraham:

was restrained from laying his hand on the lad, lest the Jews, taking occasion from the sacrifice of Isaac, should reject the declarations concerning our Savior. (*Ep. fest. 6*)

Here, Athanasius emphasized that Isaac was not actually sacrificed. In a polemical flourish, Athanasius suggested that divine intervention prevented the sacrifice so that Jews would not be misled about the difference between Isaac's sacrifice and Christ's crucifixion. On account of the intervention, Jews ought to have been able to realize the truth about who was the Savior. Yet, they had not done so. Instead, according to Athanasius, Jews applied prophetic utterances, which Athanasius and other Christians

applied to Christ, to Isaac and his sacrifice.²⁶⁵ Athanasius denied that Isaac's sacrifice was effective:

For the sacrifice was not properly the establishment of Isaac, but of Abraham who also offered, and by that he was tried. Thus God accepted the will of the offerer, but prevented that which was offered from being sacrificed. For the death of Isaac did not procure the freedom to the world, but that of our Saviour alone, by whose stripes we all are healed. (*Ep. fest.* 6)

Unlike Clement and Origen, Athanasius did not hold Isaac up as an example for his audience to follow in the sacrifice of Isaac. Athanasius diminished the significance of Isaac's sacrifice for his audience and treated Isaac as a passive lad that Abraham offered, while reinforcing the significance of Christ's sacrifice for the entire world. Christ not only saved the world through his sacrifice on the cross, but also, as the ram, Christ saved Isaac from being sacrificed by Abraham.

Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) discussed Isaac and the sacrifice of Isaac in multiple places.²⁶⁶ In his interpretation of the sacrifice of Isaac, the promise that God made to Abraham with respect to Isaac could only be fulfilled through Christ's sacrifice (Festal Letter 5.6-7). Cyril thought the sacrifice of Isaac was done for Abraham's knowledge; the

²⁶⁵ This point suggests that Jews and Christians are using similar passages to interpret Isaac in the Akedah (for Jews) and Christ in the crucifixion (for Christians). Athanasius seems to be aware of Jewish interpretations when making his argument. Kessler, *Bound by the Bible*, 133. I concur and suggest that the Jewish interpretation that makes those connections between Isaac and the prophetic verses to which Athanasius refers (Ps. 110 and Isa. 53) follows after those passages are first associated with the Messiah and Christian interpretation of Christ and Christ's crucifixion. In the Second Temple period, Isaac is not treated as a messianic figure. It seems likely that, as part of the encounter between Jews and Christians, the Jews come to re-read Isaac and Isaac's sacrifice in light of these verses. Contra Vermès, I am skeptical that Jews connected Isaac to Isa. 53 as a result of reflections on the significance of martyrdom. Vermès, "Redemption and Genesis XXII," 203.

²⁶⁶ Festal Letter 5, Homilies on the Gospel of Luke (Sermons 12, 58, 87, 152) Commentary on the Gospel of John Book 6 and Book 10, Letter 41, His Commentary on the 12 Prophets, his commentary of the Pentateuch, and in his commentaries on Paul's letters. I only discuss Festal Letter 5 here as it is Cyril's most sustained interpretation of Isaac's sacrifice.

sacrifice of Isaac taught Abraham what God the Father would undergo in the future with Christ's sacrifice (Festal Letter 5.6). But, Isaac was not actually sacrificed. In his interpretation, Cyril followed Genesis 22:1-13 closely, offering little to no additional commentary on the verses. He went on to suggest that the passage represented the mystery of the savior, and attempted to "relate the beauty of the truth to what is presented figuratively." Cyril's interpretation drew parallels between the sacrifice of Isaac and the sacrifice of Christ (Festal Letter 5.7). Yet, he also made clear the distinction between the two events. Significantly, Isaac was not slain while Christ is killed. For Cyril, Christ's sacrifice brought salvation; he did not say if Isaac's sacrifice brings anything. Isaac was the father of only one nation while Christ was the father of many nations (Festal Letter 5.5). The blessing that was given to Isaac was on account of Christ and was fulfilled through faith in Christ. It could not be completed until Christ's sacrifice (Festal Letter 5.6).

To sum up, the Alexandrian exegetes interpreted the sacrifice of Isaac typologically. Isaac was a type of Christ. As part of this interpretation, Isaac's sacrifice was only a near sacrifice and did not provide salvation for the world, like Christ's sacrifice. Sometimes, the Alexandrians treated Isaac as an example for how Christians should live their lives. He was a willing participant who rejoiced when he was saved. Isaac was also a priest at his own sacrifice. His obedience, faith, and joy made him an ideal figure for Christians to imitate. Yet, Isaac was the father of only one nation. Isaac might have been an example for Christians, but the exegetes did not suggest that their audiences would become Isaac's children. Their audiences would become children of Abraham, but only through Christ's crucifixion. They did not become Isaac's children.

2.3 Isaac as Sacrifice in *Testament of Isaac*

The sacrifice of Isaac was an important event for *T. Isaac*'s communal conception as children of Isaac, emerging explicitly at critical places in the narrative. *T. Isaac* portrayed Isaac as sacrifice and this characteristic became an example and a benefit for the textual community. Unlike the popular Second Temple period motif of Isaac as prototypical martyr, Isaac as a sacrifice suggested one should imitate Isaac's virtue of obedience to be like 'our father Isaac'. Most importantly, Isaac as a sacrifice permitted anyone who was willing to become a child of the patriarchs in God's kingdom. Unlike the previous examples of Christian interpretations, *T. Isaac* did not interpret the sacrifice of Isaac as a type of Christ's sacrifice, and unlike Jewish interpretations, *T. Isaac* did not limit the Akedah's benefit to a biological lineage. Isaac's sacrifice resulted in God's promise to the patriarchs that all who were willing could become children of Isaac.

There are two explicit allusions in the Sahidic *T. Isaac* to the sacrifice of Isaac.

The first is present in the Sahidic but absent in the other versions:²⁶⁷

The necessary thing in all of these, he should offer a sacrifice in the name of my beloved Isaac. For his [Isaac's] body was offered up as a sacrifice.
(*T. Isaac* 6.17)

This comment appears in the context of Isaac witnessing the conversation between Abraham and the Lord. This conversation is a critical episode in the narrative for justifying the textual community's identity as children of Isaac. After listing specific

²⁶⁷ Kuhn. "The Testament of Isaac," 437 n.5.

practices that one may perform in Isaac's memory,²⁶⁸ the Lord invokes Isaac's sacrifice to summarize and establish the general requirement of a sacrifice in the memory of Isaac in order to become a child of the ancestors. Isaac's sacrifice ties into the practices and identity for the children of Isaac.

The second reference is found at the conclusion of the narrative, and is retained in the Sahidic and other versions:

And the day on which his father Abraham offered him as a sacrifice was the eighteenth of Mechir. The heavens and the earth were filled in the pleasant odor of our father Isaac, like choice silver. This is the sacrifice of our father Isaac the patriarch. When Abraham offered him as a sacrifice to God, the pleasant odor of the sacrificed Isaac went to the heavens" (*T. Isaac* 8.2-4).

In this passage, Isaac is the object that Abraham sacrifices – no mention is made of Isaac's active participation. Apparently, Abraham completed the sacrifice since Isaac's aroma is sent up to the heavens. Yet, the details are lacking to say how Abraham sacrificed his son (Was Isaac slaughtered like an animal, or was another form of sacrifice performed?), or how it is that the sacrificed son (if slaughtered like an animal) lived a long life after his sacrifice. Nor do we know if the mention of Isaac's aroma is to be read

²⁶⁸ The practices offer various options, reflecting God's mercy, to allow most anyone who was willing the chance to become children of Isaac. The first practice is to copy Isaac's testament and feed the hungry (*T. Isaac* 6.7). The second practice is to feed the hungry a piece of bread (*T. Isaac* 6.10). The third practice is to go without sleep on the night of Isaac's remembrance (*T. Isaac* 6.12). The fourth practice is to offer incense in Isaac's name (*T. Isaac* 6.14). The fifth practice is to meditate on Isaac's testament (*T. Isaac* 6.15). The sixth practice is to listen to someone else read Isaac's testament (*T. Isaac* 6.15). The seventh practice is to say one hundred prayers (*T. Isaac* 6.15). These practices are to be done in Isaac's memory, especially on the day of Isaac's remembrance. The repetitive ascetic performance of these practices by the textual community would have helped them to cultivate their identity as children of Isaac. I discuss the practices in detail in the final chapter.

literally or perhaps to be read symbolically. Isaac's odor is like choice silver.²⁶⁹ This simile invokes the image of silver in the refining process.

In the context of the conclusion, Isaac's sacrifice is tied to the promise God made to Abraham:

For the Lord made a covenant with them [Abraham and Isaac] forever that anyone who does an act of mercy on the day of their remembrance, they will be given to them as children in the kingdom of heaven forever. (*T. Isaac* 8.6)

T. Isaac has taken the promise God made to Abraham in connection to Isaac's sacrifice and transformed it into a promise by which children of the ancestors are made through individuals' participation (the performance of acts of mercy). These acts of mercy are the practices that the Lord commands to Abraham in *T. Isaac* 6.

In addition to the two obvious references, I identify four possible allusions and echoes to Isaac's sacrifice.²⁷⁰ Identifying possible allusions is tricky but the presence of

²⁶⁹ Interestingly, Isaac's aroma is found in an early Christian poem (Pap. Bodmer 30) found in the Egyptian village of Dishna, dating to the 4th century. P.W.v.d. Horst. "A New Early Christian Poem on the Sacrifice of Christ (Pap. Bodmer 30)," in *Jews and Christians in Their Graeco-Roman: Selected Essays on Early Judaism, Samaritanism, Hellenism, and Christianity* (vol. 196 of *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Frey; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 190-205.

The Rabbis compare Isaac's sacrifice to the refinement of silver (*Exod. Rab.* 44.2) or an offering of frankincense (*Song Rab.* 3.6.2). Cf. *Song Rab.* 4.6.2; *'Ag. Ber.* 36. The significance of Isaac being like refined silver is that Isaac is pure; his sacrifice removed all impurities. Both the refining of silver and offering frankincense produce aromas. The smells are associated with purifying (silver) or purity (frankincense). In the biblical tradition, the incense to be offered on the incense altar is supposed to contain pure frankincense (*Exod.* 30:34).

²⁷⁰ I rely on Richard Hays's criteria for detecting echoes to test these possible allusions. Hays suggests seven tests for detecting echoes in Paul's writings:

- (1) Availability: "Was the proposed source of the echo available to the author and / or the original readers?"
- (2) Volume: "How distinctive or prominent is the precursor text within Scripture, and how much rhetorical stress does the echo receive in Paul's discourse?"
- (3) Recurrence: "How often does Paul elsewhere cite or allude to the same scriptural passage?"
- (4) Thematic Coherence: "How well does the alleged echo fit into the line of argument that Paul is developing?" "This test begins to move beyond simple identification of echoes to the problems of how to interpret them."

the two explicit references increases the possibilities that – whether the writer intended it or not – the audience may have heard at least a few of the following passages as allusions or echoes of the sacrifice of Isaac.

First, I suggest that *T. Isaac* alludes to the sacrifice of Isaac when Isaac informs Jacob of his pending death. After the angel informs Isaac that he is about to die and should not hide anything from Jacob, Isaac discloses to Jacob that he has been sent for and would no longer be with Jacob. Upon hearing he was to be an orphan, an emotional Jacob desires to go with Isaac. Isaac says that it is not Jacob's time and that Jacob should wait until he is summoned. Isaac continues,

I know myself on the day when the whole earth was shaken, I spoke to my lord and father Abraham and I did not have the strength to do anything. What God ordains to be done, he established for each one according to sure authority. They are not changeable. (3.8-10)

This passage is notoriously difficult to make sense of in any of the extant versions.²⁷¹ The one copy of the Bohairic version of *T. Isaac* is clearly talking about a cypress tree

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- (5) Historical Plausibility: "Could Paul have intended the alleged meaning effect? Could his reader have understood it?"
 - (6) History of Interpretation: "Have other readers, both critical and precritical, heard the same echoes?"
 - (7) Satisfaction: "With or without clear confirmation from the other criteria listed here, does the proposed reading make sense?"

R.B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 29-32. While Hays is dealing with Paul, his criteria still provide a useful guide for not overstating the plausibility of potential echoes. In brief answer to the criteria: (1) The Akedah is well known and available as a source of the echo, (2) the precursor text has had the volume turned up in *T. Isaac*, (3) as we only have one text with which to deal I will not concern myself with this criterion, (4) the thematic coherence will be discussed in the next section but the short answer is that it fits well, (5) both writer and reader could plausibly have intended and understood, (6) there is not sufficient history of interpretation to make this a useful criterion, but no others have not suggested the same echoes, (7) I think most make sense.

²⁷¹ Kuhn, "The Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 230 n. 3; Nagel, "Zur sahidischen Version des Testamentes Isaaks," 261; Kuhn, "An English Translation of the Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 329 n. 3; Aranda Pérez. "Testament de Isaac," 284; Heide, *Die Testamente Isaaks und Jakobs*, 197, 284. Stinespring. "Testament of Isaac," 906 n. 3a.

(κεφαρικος) in *T. Isaac* 3.8-10,²⁷² but the text is unclear at this point in the Sahidic (στυματος) – it does not refer to a cypress tree.²⁷³ Additionally, the Arabic and Ethiopic versions are also unclear at this point. Kuhn’s interpretation of the passage in the Sahidic version suggests it to mean “that though creation and created matter may be shaken, yet God’s ordinances are unshakeable.”²⁷⁴ Kuhn’s interpretation may be a nice theological understanding but it does little to make sense of the words within the narrative life of Isaac. That is, whatever the theological meaning, it does not offer an answer to which event in Isaac’s life – as told in the biblical and post-biblical narratives – Isaac is referring. I suggest that Isaac is recounting his own sacrifice.²⁷⁵

The passage is referring to aspects of the story of Isaac’s sacrifice. First, Isaac’s conversation with Abraham on their journey together (Gen. 22:7-8) would fit the reference in *T. Isaac*. Second, the acceptance of what God ordained is consistent with the motif that emphasizes Abraham’s and Isaac’s obedience to God’s command to sacrifice Isaac (motif 5). In *T. Isaac*, Isaac is saying that when it is one’s time to die, do not fight it. This attitude reflects Isaac as a willing sacrifice and prototypical martyr (motifs 2 and 3). This passage seems to allude to the father and son facing a pending death in the manner God commanded. Isaac’s willing acceptance of God’s commands and plans in

²⁷² Gaselee translates the Bohairic, “I also remember a day when the high and flourishing cypress was moved ...” Gaselee. "Appendix Containing a Translation from the Coptic Version of the Testaments of Isaac and Jacob," 62.

²⁷³ Kuhn suggests it is Sahidic for *στομα*. Kuhn, "The Sahidic Version of the Testament of Isaac," 230 n.3.

²⁷⁴ Kuhn. "The Testament of Isaac," 430 n.5.

²⁷⁵ Unfortunately, my reading is only a suggestion since I have not found an ancient rabbinic interpretation that connects the shaking of the world with Isaac’s sacrifice. The reference to the shaking of the world in connection to the Akedah is not attested to the best of my knowledge in the early interpretations of Gen. 22.

the sacrifice of Isaac seems to be the allusion to which Isaac is referring when he talks to Jacob.

A second possible allusion to the sacrifice of Isaac occurs in the sacerdotal instructions that Isaac gives to the priest of God (4.8-12). The tradition of Isaac as a priest, while most clearly related to the Levi Priestly tradition (as argued in the previous chapter), finds support in Origen's interpretation of Genesis 22. Thus, the advice may invoke Isaac's role as priest and victim to the reader of *T. Isaac*. I am not sure, however, that the reader of *T. Isaac* would necessarily have heard such an allusion – nor that the writer intended it. Nonetheless, it is not too much of a stretch to connect Isaac's sacrifice with the instructions for the priesthood. Isaac could have observed and learned some of the rules for sacrifice from Abraham on the occasion. Yet, *T. Isaac* is quite elusive in identifying Isaac's sacerdotal wisdom with wisdom passed down from Abraham. So, there is not an explicit mention of where Isaac received his wisdom when he speaks to the priest of God, thus muting any allusion to Isaac as a priest and sacrifice.

Third, the reference to Isaac as Abraham's 'beloved' son in *T. Isaac* echoes Gen. 22 (LXX) and the sacrifice of Isaac traditions. Isaac as 'beloved' is a common epithet of Isaac in *T. Isaac*. It goes back to Genesis 22:2, the only biblical reference to Isaac as the beloved son and is a characteristic of Isaac lifted up by early interpreters of the Akedah. The use of this epithet links *T. Isaac* to the sacrifice of Isaac.

Fourth, a possible allusion to the Akedah comes from the Bohairic version of *T. Isaac*, even though it is absent in the Sahidic version. When Isaac is about to come out

from the body, Abraham asks the Lord to remember his son (Bohairic *T. Isaac* 6.30).²⁷⁶

This request to remember Abraham's son is found in the conclusion to numerous early Jewish accounts of the binding of Isaac as part of Abraham's prayer, for example y.

Ta'an. 2.4.²⁷⁷ In the ancient Jewish liturgy the Lord is called on to remember the Akedah (b. *Roš Haš* 16a). While the Bohairic version omitted the explicit references to Isaac's sacrifice in the discussion between the Lord and Abraham, it may be an additional reference to recall the promise given to Abraham and his descendants on account of the sacrifice of Isaac.

There is an additional possibility that I do not think is an allusion to the sacrifice of Isaac. The narrator introduces the work with the mention of "the end of obedience" (*T. Isaac* 1.4).

The blessings of the patriarch will be on the ones who will come after us, and the ones who listen to these words, these wise words, and these medicines of life. So that the grace of God will be with everyone who believes, that is to say, the end of obedience, like it is written, "You have heard a word, let it abide in you." (*T. Isaac* 1.3-4)

Since the Akedah is a motif that writers used to demonstrate Abraham's and Isaac's obedience to their God, one might suggest that this phrase, in a work about Isaac, may have triggered the reader to think of the sacrifice of Isaac. Nonetheless, the suggestion is wanting. Obedience was an important virtue in early Christian monasticism in general.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ The Arabic and Ethiopic (recension II) of Martin Heide's critical edition of these versions similarly follow the Bohairic, although the Ethiopic has Abraham say "Remember my house." The Ethiopic (recension I) does not have Abraham speak at this point in the narrative. Heide, *Die Testamente Isaaks und Jakobs*.

²⁷⁷ Cf. *Gen. Rab.* 56.9, 56.10; *'Ag. Ber.* 38; *Frg. Tg. Gen.* 22.14.

²⁷⁸ M. Foucault. "Technologies of the Self," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (ed. Rabinow; vol. 1 of *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*; New York: The New Press, 1997), 223-52. Foucault suggests that care for the self in Christian monasticism is transformed into obedience to others.

Additionally, it may have been a rhetorical technique to encourage the reader to obey the lessons of *T. Isaac*. Indeed, in context, it is connected with a quotation “You have heard a word, let it abide with you,” (*T. Isaac* 1.4) that Kuhn suggests is a variant or adaptation of Sirach 19.10.²⁷⁹ *T. Isaac* 1.4 is part of the introductory exhortation to listen to these words, to believe in the words of God in order to become inheritors of the kingdom of God. I am unsatisfied with the reference to obedience here as an allusion to the sacrifice of Isaac that the writer of *T. Isaac* intended the reader to understand.

The references and allusions to the Akedah (sacrifice of Isaac) traditions in *T. Isaac* are important for the narrative and its development of Isaac’s character. First, Isaac’s sacrifice shapes the reason why *T. Isaac*’s textual community was supposed to remember the patriarch. This reason appears in the conversation of the Lord and Abraham and in the concluding narrator comments: Isaac is a sacrifice to the Lord. Additionally, Isaac’s ‘beloved’ status is present throughout the narrative. Furthermore, he is obedient, following the commands of God. Isaac is portrayed as both priest and sacrifice, similar to Origen’s portrayal. Also like Origen, the writer of *T. Isaac* characterized Isaac as one with a special relationship with God. His special status enhances his authority. The patriarch’s virtue of obedience became a model for the monks of *T. Isaac*’s textual community to imitate.

Interpreters of the Isaac tradition in early Jewish and Christian writings developed the promise that results from Isaac’s sacrifice for their communities. Likewise, *T. Isaac*’s textual community interpreted Isaac’s sacrifice and the promise’s importance for them in *T. Isaac*. Isaac’s sacrifice was crucial for establishing the communal identity as children

²⁷⁹ Kuhn. "The Testament of Isaac," 427 n.1.

of Isaac in *T. Isaac*. On account of it, the Lord promised to give children to Abraham and Isaac (*T. Isaac* 6). The textual community was called to remember Isaac's sacrifice and the eternal covenant the Lord made with Abraham and Isaac that whoever performed acts of mercies on Isaac's day of remembrance would become their child in the kingdom of heaven forever (*T. Isaac* 8).

In establishing the children of the patriarchs, *T. Isaac* offered the textual community of *T. Isaac* an alternative approach to the two popular interpretations of the Akedah (sacrifice of Isaac). *T. Isaac* was not interpreting Isaac and his sacrifice as a type of Christ and his crucifixion. While there are mentions of Christ, *T. Isaac* did not offer a typological interpretation to connect the two figures. Isaac prophesies the life of Christ (*T. Isaac* 3.14-18), but no typological connection is made in his prophecy. In *T. Isaac* 6, the narrative is still concerned with Isaac's sacrifice in the time of Abraham, not with the sacrifice of Christ as is usual for the typological interpretation. Isaac's sacrifice was beneficial on its own account. *T. Isaac* presents Isaac as Isaac, unlike the Alexandrian exegetes who wrote 'Isaac' but then indicated that by Isaac they meant 'Christ'.²⁸⁰ The closest one gets is when Isaac is called "beloved." Yet, even here, Isaac is kept distinct from Christ.²⁸¹ Isaac's sacrifice established the conditions for one to become children of the ancestors. In the end, however, *T. Isaac* retained a role for Christ to fulfill the promise that God made to Abraham on account of Isaac's sacrifice. Before Isaac comes out of the body, the Lord says to him, "when it happens and I become a man and I die and I rise

²⁸⁰ For example, Origen *Hom. Gen.* 6 and *Hom. Gen.* 12.

²⁸¹ Kessler warns against assuming that imagery of Jesus as the beloved son in the gospels are necessarily linked to Isaac in Genesis 22. Kessler, *Bound by the Bible*, 39-41.

from the dead on the third day, I will put your name in everyone's mind and they will invoke you as father" (*T. Isaac* 6.31). *T. Isaac*, then, did not abandon Christ for the possibility of salvation.²⁸²

Throughout *T. Isaac*, the narrator uses the term "our father" to discuss Isaac. This might lead one to conclude that the writer of *T. Isaac* was reading the Akedah in regards to a biological lineage of Isaac in the manner that Jews through the millennia have tended to do. That is, even though the Akedah may have benefits for the nations, the primary beneficiaries of the promises given to the patriarchs are the descendants of Isaac later regarded as Jews. In the rabbinic interpretation of the Akedah, the merit of Isaac offered benefits to his physical descendants. While they may have conceived of other ways for one to become a part of the Jewish religion, the tradition remained that the patriarchs were the "our fathers" of those physically descending from Jews.²⁸³ When reading *T. Isaac*, however, I do not find the claim to the biological lineage of Isaac *in the present time* for the textual community. *T. Isaac* only names Jacob explicitly as part of Isaac's biological lineage. *T. Isaac* does not suggest that the textual community was from the biological seed of Isaac, nor was the community concerned with protecting the priestly lineage (see Chapter 1). Instead, the discussion moves to include all who remember Isaac to be part of the children of the patriarchs in the Lord's kingdom. Isaac is named as the "Patriarch and Father of the World" (*T. Isaac* 2.8). In *T. Isaac*, then, Isaac's family is not

²⁸² This is similar to the early Christian tradition that the promise from Isaac's sacrifice are fulfilled in Christ's sacrifice, since it is through Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection that everyone (Jews and Gentiles) will know Isaac as father.

²⁸³ Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*, 308-40.

limited to a biological-ethnic lineage, but is articulated as an alternative notion that includes the entire world as possible children.²⁸⁴

One might ask if the absence of the claim to a biological lineage really matters for the narrative of *T. Isaac*. Since the usual way of interpreting the patriarch's sacrifice in the Jewish trajectory is to acknowledge its efficacy for the people of Israel, and the lineage plays a role in this conception, its absence in *T. Isaac* points to an alternative way of understanding the benefit of the sacrifice of Isaac.

Unlike *T. Isaac*, ancient Jewish interpreters did not suggest the Akedah event offers the benefit of changing the status of non-biological Jews into children of the patriarchs. The Akedah was important for their Jewish identity, as Himmelfarb demonstrates, but when it came to conversion, the Akedah did not play a part. In rabbinic times, conversion to Judaism did not involve the Akedah as part of the theological underpinning of the conversion ceremony located in b. *Yebam* 47a-b.²⁸⁵

In addition, according to the Mishnah, the Jewish convert remained a non-biological Jew. As Shaye Cohen observes, "only native Jews have Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons as their 'fathers'."²⁸⁶ Converts were not to say "our fathers" but "your fathers" when they brought their first-fruits and make the avowal in community with biological-Jews (m. *Bik.* 1.4-5). While converts were members of the community in terms of belief and practice, within the community the converts were

²⁸⁴ This is a striking difference from the church fathers as well, since they distinguished between Isaac and Christ by limiting Isaac to a father of only one nation.

²⁸⁵ According to Cohen, "the midrash claims that the conversion to Judaism is a reenactment of the revelation of the Torah on Sinai, but our text contains no allusion to Sinai or revelation or covenant." Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*, 235.

²⁸⁶ Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*, 324.

distinct from biological Jews.²⁸⁷ While the Rabbis continued to develop their understanding of the converts place within Judaism, the Rabbis in the *Babylonian Talmud* accept the opinion found in the Mishnah.²⁸⁸ I suggest that the Rabbis' anxiety for clarifying the distinction between biological Jews and convert Jews shows that biological lineage was an important aspect of Jewish identity during late antiquity. In their debate, the rabbis did not suggest the Akedah as transforming non-biological Jews into the children of the ancestors. It seems that the idea that the Akedah offers the possibility for a non-biological lineage was not part of the dominant rabbinic discourse.

Thus, when *T. Isaac*'s textual community read *T. Isaac* to support their identity as a non-biological family for the patriarchs on account of the sacrifice of Isaac, it distinguished *T. Isaac* from the dominant rabbinic trajectory. *T. Isaac*'s textual community interpreted *T. Isaac*'s portrayal of Isaac as sacrifice in order to create a communal identity that did not continue to distinguish biological identities within the community. The communal identity was based on practice and belief. In a monastic context where monks sacrificed their biological familial ties to become part of an alternative family, the textual community of *T. Isaac* found an alternative identity as children of Isaac.

²⁸⁷ Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*, 325.

²⁸⁸ But note, the Rabbis in *Yerushalmi* rejected the Mishnah. Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*, 329. The medieval rabbis discussed this issue as well.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sketched out various possibilities for interpreting the Akedah (sacrifice of Isaac) in Second Temple literature, rabbinic works, and early Christian writings. There is overlap and difference in the ways that Christians and the Rabbis interpreted Isaac's sacrifice. The two groups used Isaac as an ethical example; however, they interpreted his significance as a model for different reasons. In the Jewish tradition, Isaac's binding had soteriological benefits for his biological progeny. In the Christian tradition, Isaac's sacrifice became a type of Christ's crucifixion. For Christians, the sacrifice of Isaac did not have efficacy for anyone's salvation. It was only Christ's death that provided salvation to the world.

Against the backdrop of this conversation, *T. Isaac* provided *T. Isaac*'s textual community an alternative paradigm in which one became a child of Isaac, and gained the benefits of this status, through practice, obedience, and remembering Isaac – while ultimately still relying on Christ's death and resurrection to put Isaac into the people's mind. *T. Isaac*'s textual community relied on *T. Isaac*'s portrayal of Isaac as sacrifice to justify this communal identity and understanding. In the process, Isaac's character is put forth as an example. One is to remember Isaac and to heed Isaac's words. The characterization of Isaac as a sacrifice holds up Isaac's obedience and piety to God's commands. This suggests virtues that the textual community should have imitated to be like 'our father Isaac' regardless of biological origins. For *T. Isaac*'s textual community, the benefit of Isaac as a sacrifice was to permit anyone who was willing the opportunity to become a child of Isaac in God's kingdom. Biological birth did not define the children of Isaac. Practice, obedience, and the remembrance of Isaac defined the children of Isaac.

The tradition of Isaac's sacrifice remembered in *T. Isaac* is similar to monastic literature's presentation of Isaac's sacrifice. In both, Isaac was a model of obedience to God. God's promise to the patriarchs on account of the sacrifice of Isaac was present; in the case of *T. Isaac*, the promise was extended to include everyone who performs a prescribed act in remembrance of Isaac as a child of Isaac. The performance of the acts helped to create an alternative family in which Isaac became the remembered father of *T. Isaac's* textual community.

Part of the overall argument of the dissertation is that Isaac was a model of the new self for *T. Isaac's* textual community. The model as I imagine it incorporates three dimensions of the remembered tradition of Isaac. Isaac as sacrifice is the second dimension of the model of Isaac. As sacrifice, Isaac exemplified the virtue of obedience. The memory of Isaac as sacrifice helped to imagine a new family for the *T. Isaac's* textual community, as children of Isaac, based on ascetic performances in remembrance of Isaac. Along with Isaac as priestly authority and Isaac as blind ascetic, this dimension of Isaac's character further developed what the new self should have been for the textual community that read *T. Isaac* as an ascetical regimen. In the next chapter, I will explore the third dimension of Isaac's character, Isaac as a blind ascetic.

Chapter 3

Isaac as Blind Ascetic

Isaac as blind ascetic is not an image one finds in the narrative of Genesis. While the blessing of Jacob in Genesis 27 relies on Isaac's blindness for Jacob to obtain the blessing, Isaac's blindness does not result in Isaac becoming an ascetic in the biblical narrative. When we turn to *T. Isaac*, however, we find Isaac as blind ascetic. In this chapter, I will show that *T. Isaac* portrays Isaac's blindness in a typical, ableist manner.²⁸⁹ At the same time, *T. Isaac* highlights Isaac's blindness as an aspect of Isaac's ascetic life. In this ambiguous treatment of Isaac's blindness, *T. Isaac* reflects the ambiguity that is found in early monastic attitudes towards impairments and disabilities. The interpretation of Isaac's blindness in tradition shows that there was interest in Isaac's blindness among ancient Jews and Christians, and was not something that was novel to *T. Isaac*. Yet, *T. Isaac*'s textual community remembers Isaac's blindness in connection to his asceticism, a different account of Isaac's blindness than other interpreters recounted. Isaac's portrayal as blind ascetic became the third dimension of the model that Isaac provided for the subjectivity that the textual community sought to adopt through its ascetic performances.

²⁸⁹ By 'ableist', disability studies scholars intend the dominant able-bodied cultural beliefs that many times classify disability and assign it with negative messages. B.A. Haller, *Representing Disability in an Ableist World: Essays on Mass Media* (Louisville, Ky.: The Advocado Press, 2010), 67.

After a discussion of disability studies, I will briefly contextualize disability in early Egyptian monasticism. Next, I will look at interpretations of Isaac's blindness in early Jewish and Christian tradition. There were many interpretive possibilities for Isaac's blindness. Then, I will examine Isaac's blindness in *T. Isaac*. I show that Isaac's blindness is not necessarily a disability in *T. Isaac*. On the one hand, Isaac actively practices asceticism, he sacrifices and worships on earth, and he converses with angelic beings. On the other hand, *T. Isaac* stigmatized blindness when Isaac's sight is restored through the attitude of Isaac and those gathered to him. In the narrative, sight is the preferred status; to be able to see is a divine blessing. The return of Isaac's eyesight affirms his ascetic life and the authority of his words. *T. Isaac's* textual community found in this image of Isaac, an example for ascetic practice and a life of contemplation that was not distracted by the world around it.

3.1 Key Concepts in Disability Studies

I draw on disability studies to assist in analyzing how the ancient interpreters understood Isaac's blindness and how Isaac's blindness functions in *T. Isaac*. The cultural model of disability that I utilize is based on understanding the category of disability as a cultural construction.²⁹⁰ The cultural model approaches disability as a category that different cultures construct in various ways in order to interpret and understand physical and cognitive difference. It looks to see how disability informs

²⁹⁰ M. Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); L.J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995); B. Ingstad and S.R. Whyte eds. *Disability and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); C. Barnes and G. Mercer, *Disability* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003); M.L. Rose, *The Staff of Oedipus: Transforming Disability in Ancient Greece* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press, 2003); R.P. Shuttleworth and D. Kasnitz, "Cultural Context of Disability," *Encyclopedia of Disability* 1:330-37.

cultural worldviews and organizations.²⁹¹ The cultural model differs from two other models: the ‘medical model’, which understands disability as “biologically inherent and universally constant,” and the ‘social model’, which understands disability as “the result of social discrimination against certain physical or cognitive impairments.”²⁹² One cultural approach is to understand disability based on a person’s roles in the community. A disability prevents a person from fulfilling a role. That is not to say that there is not a physical difference between one with limited eyesight and one with ‘normal’ eyesight. Rather, “‘physical disability’ has no inherent meaning but is defined by any given community’s understanding of people’s roles.”²⁹³

The meaning of blindness as a disability today is different from the meaning of blindness as a disability in antiquity. Today, America has degrees of blindness based on medical tests and laws that determine how much blindness is allowable before it becomes a disability, such as the eye exam one takes to acquire a driver’s license from the state. In ancient Egypt, there were two categories, sightedness and blindness – they were not a continuum, but opposites. A person was blind or sighted, but not both at the same time. In a world where physical impairments are common, blindness would not necessarily be treated as a physical disability unless it prohibited the individual from fulfilling her social role as defined by the community. Furthermore, being unable to fulfill a social role does

²⁹¹ N. Junior and J. Schipper, "Mosaic Disability and Identity in Exodus 4:10; 6:12, 30," *BibInt* 16, (2008): 432.

²⁹² Junior and Schipper, "Mosaic Disability and Identity," 432.

²⁹³ M.L. Edwards. "Constructions of Physical Disability in the Ancient World: The Community Concept," in *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability* (eds. Mitchell and Snyder; *The Body, in Theory: Histories of Cultural Materialism*; Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 35.

not necessarily mean that the person is always 'disabled' in a manner that prevents the person for participating actively in society.

As categories, impairment and disability are not synonymous. Impairment is the physical, physiological, or psychological embodied limit that is socially determined to be too different from the norm. Impairments are also cultural constructions since the kinds of impairment that occur within different societies are not random but are the results of numerous factors.²⁹⁴ If sightedness is viewed as the norm for society, then blindness can be classified as an impairment. Blindness is not classified as a disability, however, until the person with blindness is unable to fulfill her role(s) in society. The distinction lies in viewing disability in relation to social roles.

A third term, stigma, is sometimes discussed in relation to disability and impairment. I operate with a notion of stigma that society marks those who are unable to conform to the normative standards of their culture. Stigma affects the way people interact with each other. It may also have a socio-psychological effect on the individual who is stigmatized.²⁹⁵ Yet, it is important to guard against the automatic imposition of twenty first century standards for viewing stigmatization. Stigmas are culturally constructed, and more factors (economic, social status, family situation, point in lifecycle, etc.) add to the complexity of the relationship between impairment, disability, and

²⁹⁴ Rose, *The Staff of Oedipus*, 80. For another perspective on blindness in ancient Greece, see R. Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995). For a general discussion of the blind and blindness see B.R. Miller, "Blind, History of the," *Encyclopedia of Disability* 1:181-85; B. Omansky, "Blindness and Visual Impairment," *Encyclopedia of Disability* 1:185-93. Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement*, 12-24. See also, Shuttleworth and Kasnitz, "Cultural Context of Disability," 330-337.

²⁹⁵ The seminal work on stigmatization theory as a social-psychology is E. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986).

stigma.²⁹⁶ Often in the ancient Greco-Roman world, the stigma comes from the view of the impairment as a result of divine displeasure or human wrong doing.²⁹⁷ One whose impairment has an obvious virtuous reason does not face the same stigmas – for example, impairments that result from military service are praised in ancient Greece.²⁹⁸ On the other hand, in a world where one’s body was thought to indicate the health and nature of one’s soul, a physical impairment could carry a stigma.²⁹⁹

Illness is another category sometimes discussed under the umbrella of disability studies. It is not the same thing as disease. While disease is biological pathology based on medical models, illness is “a broad set of experiences around the disease,” including how the individual and the community understand the disease and how one experiences the disease. Illness is a socio-cultural category.³⁰⁰ Illness and disability are not one in the

²⁹⁶ R.I. Westerholm, et al., "Stigma," *Encyclopedia of Disability* 4:1502-7; R.I. Westerholm, et al., "Stigma, International," *Encyclopedia of Disability* 4:1507-10.

While it may be intertwined with our notions of impairment and disability, I wish to keep stigma somewhat distinct in order to see when examples actually show blindness to be a disability, and when they only hint at it through the stigmatization of the impairment. Additionally, Oliver points out that in associating disability and stigma, the focus turns to individuals and away from the institutional practices of disablement. Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement*, 68.

²⁹⁷ H.-J. Stiker, *A History of Disability* (Corporealities; eds. Mitchell and Snyder; trans. Sayers; Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 39-64. Like other physical and cognitive differences, the relationship between the deities and the person who is blind could be ambiguous. On the one hand, it could be viewed as divine punishment. On the other hand, the loss of sight sometimes resulted in the person receiving another gift from the gods. N. Kelley. "Deformity and Disability in Greece and Rome," in *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies* (eds. Avalos, et al.; vol. 55 of *Semeia Studies*, ed. Yee; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 41-44.

²⁹⁸ Edwards. "Constructions of Physical Disability in the Ancient Greek World," 39-40.

²⁹⁹ Physiognomy, “the art of interpreting a person’s character and inner state of the basis of the visible, physiological characteristics,” was an accepted practice in the ancient world. This allows one to read the body to know or predict the character of a person, to know her soul. D.B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 18-19. This practice would stigmatize the physical difference.

³⁰⁰ E. Anderson-Frye, "Disease," *Encyclopedia of Disability* 1:502-503.

same, there are people with disabilities who are not ill and there are people with illnesses who do not have disabilities.

I am concerned with literary representations of blindness in *T. Isaac* as well as the cultural construction of blindness as a disability. Jeremy Schipper's work on Mephibosheth in the David narrative notes the role that representations of disability play.³⁰¹ Narratives represent certain things to achieve certain goals. The representation of a disability emphasizes certain aspects of the thing to the neglect of others in order to achieve the intended goals. It invites the audience to explore the significance of the disability. In the process, the disability becomes a metaphor taken out of the context of the actual experience of living with the disability.³⁰² David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder identify two primary functions of representations of disability in literary discourse: "as a stock feature of characterization" and "as an opportunistic metaphorical device."³⁰³ As such, I am interested to see how the Isaacic tradition interpreted Isaac's blindness in order to ascertain its use in characterizing Isaac and as a metaphorical device for *T. Isaac*'s narrative.

3.2 The Egyptian Monastic Context and Disability and Illness

³⁰¹ J. Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story* (LHB/OTS 441; eds. Camp and Mein; New York: T & T Clark, 2006).

³⁰² Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible*, 61-62.

³⁰³ D.T. Mitchell and S.L. Snyder. "Narrative Prosthesis and the Materiality of Metaphor," in *The Disability Studies Reader* (ed. Davis; New York: Routledge, 2006), 205. See also their more developed exploration, D.T. Mitchell and S.L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press, 2001).

Given the contextual nature of disability, a few words concerning the proposed Egyptian monastic context of *T. Isaac*'s textual community are in order. Ancient Egyptians experienced a prevalence of eye problems.³⁰⁴ So, it would not have been surprising to find blind monks as part of the monastic community. At the White Monastery in the fourth and fifth century, we know that the blind are present and receive equal rations to other members of the monastic community.³⁰⁵ Monastic communities developed healthcare systems in which they incorporated "all manners of sick and disabled people into monastic society."³⁰⁶ Along with chronically ill and the elderly, individuals with physical impairments received benefits in recognition of their limitations but their limitations did not exempt them from meeting behavioral obligations.³⁰⁷ Illness related to sin and demon afflictions were distinguished from those from natural causes in monastic healthcare.³⁰⁸ Pachomius (as portrayed in the *Life of Pachomius*) and Shenoute (in his own writings) distinguished between natural illnesses and demonic illnesses.³⁰⁹

While histories and hagiography indicate occasionally that sin caused illness, monastic

³⁰⁴ A.T. Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital: Christian Monasticism & the Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 36.

³⁰⁵ R. Krawiec, *Shenoute & the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 185-86 n. 84. See *The Canons of Shenoute*.

³⁰⁶ Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 39. Crislip's uses the term 'disabled' in the common sense of the word. Impaired would be more accurate than disabled if one was looking to apply the categorical from the cultural model of disability.

³⁰⁷ Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 82-83.

³⁰⁸ Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 19-21. Crislip argues that monasteries had the cutting edge medical technology and treatments available, as well as the range of spiritual, non-medical treatments. Monastic healthcare used both types of treatment, although some outside the norm preferred only the spiritual treatments (19-38). Thus, the vast majority involved in healthcare for monastic society would have balanced theological views of illness and disability with ancient medical taxonomies.

³⁰⁹ A. Crislip, "The Sin of Sloth or the Illness of the Demons? The Demon of Acedia in Early Christian Monasticism," *HTR* 98, no. 2 (2005): 148-49.

leaders did not ordinarily do so.³¹⁰ Nonetheless, illness was often viewed as socially undesirable.³¹¹ Overcoming illness became an ideal.³¹²

In the writings of the Egyptian monastic Shenoute (ca.385-465), illness was a sign of transgressions committed by the community.³¹³ When Shenoute's individual body became ill, he utilized the rhetoric of the sin of the community – not his own individual sins – as a cause of the illness. Shenoute implied a connection between the health of his body and his authority within the community. By identifying his illness with the sins of the community, he became a suffering servant, not a punished sinner. He took on the sins of the community to preserve its holiness. As Rebecca Krawiec states, “In so representing his illness, Shenoute links his leadership and his suffering into one.”³¹⁴ The rhetoric of suffering for the community's sins enhanced Shenoute's authority as the head of the community. This rhetoric also protected Shenoute from attacks on his authority by those who might claim he was ill on account of his own sin.

³¹⁰ Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 76. The ancient historiographers of Egyptian monastic life, Palladius and Cassian, when they wrote about illness and disability in passing, connect the body's ailment with asceticism and the soul's health. Regnault, *The Day-to-Day Life of the Desert Fathers in Fourth-Century Egypt*, 225. Sometimes illness was the result of extreme austerity that was discouraged under the common rule in coenobitic communities. A. Crislip. "I Have Chosen Sickness": The Controversial Function of Sickness in Early Christian Ascetic Practices," in *Asceticism and Its Critics: Historical Accounts and Comparative Perspectives* (ed. Freiburger; *American Academy of Religion Cultural Criticism Series*, ed. Kinnard; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 179-210.

³¹¹ Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 82, 89-90.

³¹² Crislip. "I Have Chosen Sickness", 179-210.

³¹³ Krawiec, *Shenoute & the Women of the White Monastery*, 69.

³¹⁴ Krawiec, *Shenoute & the Women of the White Monastery*, 69.

Shenoute's view of the monastic body related to physiognomists' view that the body revealed the soul and the reshaped body affects the soul.³¹⁵ According to Schroeder, "For Shenoute, however, the source of sinful corruption was often not an agent or principle outside of the monastic body but a member of that body."³¹⁶ Shenoute adapted Paul's language of the body as the location of the Temple of God when he demanded the need for holiness and purity in the monastic body.³¹⁷ The ascetic goal was to purify the body and the soul.³¹⁸

In Shenoute's writings, blindness as a metaphor was a negative attribute, associated with male monks who do not do their labors.³¹⁹ Blindness was coupled with foolishness. This coupling may have stigmatized those blind members of the community who were listening to his words.

The ascetical theorist Evagrius of Pontus (ca.345-399), who was a monk in Egypt, quite literally read physical ailments as signs of one's soul. In the first sixteen chapters of *Thirty-Three Ordered Chapters*, Evagrius listed ailments of the physical body and their corresponding passions of the soul.³²⁰ Evagrius thought that by reading his body the monk was better able to work on his own soul. Evagrius wrote that "Blindness is the

³¹⁵ C.T. Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies: Discipline and Salvation in Shenoute of Atripe* (eds. Boyarin, et al.; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 12.

³¹⁶ Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies*, 13.

³¹⁷ Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies*, 105-106.

³¹⁸ Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies*, 127.

³¹⁹ Krawiec, *Shenoute & the Women of the White Monastery*, 137.

³²⁰ R.E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus* (OECTS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 224-26. Evagrius identifies as problematic physical conditions: jaundice, curved spine, gangrene, blindness, paralysis, gonorrhea, 'apokathisis', leprosy, folly, contusions, deformation of the nose, mutilation of the ear, skin spots, stuttering, lameness, and dropsy.

ignorance of the mind, not giving attention to the virtues of the practical life and the contemplation of things” (*Thirty-Three Ordered Chapters* 4). Such passages allowed the monk who suffered from the ailments of the body to work on the ailments of the soul. Of course, Evagrius did not address the issue of the monk who gave attention to “the virtues of the practical life and the contemplation of things” and remained physically blind. Evagrius was concerned with diagnosing the soul, not curing the physical body.

In sum, it would not have been surprising for a person who was blind to actively participate in monastic society. In monastic writings, blindness was sometimes used as a negative metaphor. Also, there were moments where physical difference and illness were noticed as signs of sinfulness and demon affliction. Monastics had to diagnose their conditions to determine if the conditions were the results of sin, demon affliction, or natural causes. Monastic notions of the body and the soul are similar to that of ancient physiognomists. Ascetic practices helped to reshape the body and, thus, affect the soul.

3.3 The Tradition of Isaac’s Blindness

Most readers today probably do not think twice about Isaac’s blindness in Genesis 27:1. Yet, Isaac’s blindness received attention from various ancient interpreters. There was no dominant trajectory for how to interpret Isaac’s blindness. Often, it was viewed as a disability or stigma, though some interpreted it in a more neutral sense. Some even interpreted it in order to minimize the physical experience of blindness and transform Isaac’s blindness into a mystical ideal for seeking God. Finally, the double change of Isaac’s visual status (from sightedness to blindness to sightedness) that is attested in *T*.

Isaac was rare in antiquity, with no other example of the second change occurring on Isaac's deathbed.

In Genesis, Isaac is the first person described as blind, ויהי כִּי־זָקֵן יִצְחָק וְתַכְהִיֵּן עֵינָיו (Gen. 27:1). The root כהה in the *qal* carries an idea of 'to dim' that would gloss something like, "And it happened that Isaac was old and his eyes dimmed from seeing." In isolation, Isaac's blindness seems to be related to his becoming old. This connection seems understandable since some people become more limited in their vision as they age, but we should remember that this is not always the case. Furthermore, we need to be clear which trait – that is, Isaac's blindness or Isaac's old age – is the issue.

In Gen. 27:1's literary context additional possibilities emerge. Immediately before the verse, in Genesis 26:34-35, Esau's marries two Hittite women who make life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 26:35). Then, Isaac is old and experiences blindness (Gen. 27:1). This verse leads into the pericope in which Jacob receives the blessing intended for Esau when Jacob takes advantage of Isaac's limits of visual perception and Jacob alters his own aroma and texture to imitate Esau (Gen. 27). In modern biblical interpretation it might seem more intuitive to some scholars to put Gen. 27:1 with what follows – as witnessed by how various commentaries break up the pericopae.³²¹ The ancient interpreters, however, connected Isaac's blindness to both what comes before and after the verse.

In Genesis 27:2, Isaac indicates that he is close to death. Does this mean we should connect Isaac's blindness with death, as if to become blind is also to come close to

³²¹ For example: Rad, *Genesis*; Brueggemann, *Genesis*; N.M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989).

death? Kerry Wynn argues that some modern readers associate Isaac's blindness in the previous verse with death. Wynn picks Susan Niditch as representative of such readings.

Niditch, however, asserts that old age parallels blindness in Gen 27:1 and death in Gen 27:2 (83). The implication is that blindness and death are to be seen as the same experience.³²²

Wynn pushes back against this implication. He is correct to caution scholars against making this link. While both parallel old age, the experience of blindness is not the experience of death. In Gen. 27:2, then, Isaac's blindness does not carry the stigma of death. Rather, the reader imposes the stigma based on her own theological and cultural context. In this case, the stigmatization is not occurring in the text, it is part of the reader's reading of the text.

In relation to Genesis 27, Wynn does well to suggest that Isaac's blindness is not a disability.³²³ Isaac's age and Isaac's blindness are separate issues within the passage. Isaac declaring he is old sets in motion his need, as head-of-household, to give the patriarchal blessing. Isaac's blindness does not prohibit him from being able to accomplish this task. He does not lose his social role and authority to do so because he is blind. Indeed, if not for members of his family deceiving him, Isaac would have bestowed the blessing on Esau as he had intended. Even without the sense of sight, Isaac continues to examine Jacob using reason and his other senses. As Wynn states,

Isaac is a capable patriarch who requires those around him to provide the accommodations that enable him to fulfill his role in society. That

³²² K.H. Wynn. "The Normate Hermeneutic and Interpretations of Disability within the Yahwistic Narratives," in *This Able Body: Rethinking Disability Studies in Biblical Studies* (eds. Avalos, et al.; vol. 55 of *Semeia Studies*, ed. Yee; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 93.

³²³ Wynn. "The Normate Hermeneutic," 93-96.

Rebekah and Jacob disable Isaac through dishonesty in accommodations does not reflect on the ability of Isaac but upon Rebekah and Jacob.³²⁴

From Wynn's perspective, blindness is not a disability since Isaac is able to fulfill his role and give the patriarchal blessing to his son. Due to Isaac's limits, the family needs to offer certain accommodations that would allow Isaac to successfully complete his duty. When Rebekah and Jacob deceive Isaac they disable him from fulfilling his role. In Wynn's perspective, the problem is with Rebekah and Jacob, not with Isaac and his blindness. Wynn's argument is persuasive and cautions readers about what assumptions they are making in their interpretation of the blindness. Isaac has a way in which he could fulfill his social role with his given visual status. He retains his power as head-of-household. His blindness explains the actions his son and wife take. Isaac's blindness may limit him, but he retains other sensory faculties (smell and touch) that allow him fulfill his roles. Jacob receives the blessing through a thorough deception and betrayal. Thus, the problem is not with Isaac's blindness but with familial relationships.

Four additional observations will be helpful for when I discuss later interpretations of Isaac's blindness. First, in general, the writers of Genesis were not too concerned with Isaac's blindness. Second, once Isaac becomes blind he remains blind. Isaac's eyesight is not restored in Genesis's account. Third, no where in Genesis does Isaac do anything that explicitly displeases Ha-Shem and would have resulted in Isaac's blindness being a sign of divine displeasure with Isaac. Fourth, Isaac remains the paternal head-of-the-household and maintains his social duties as the patriarch.³²⁵ All and all,

³²⁴ Wynn. "The Normate Hermeneutic," 96.

³²⁵ Consider that in Gen. 28, Isaac demonstrates his power to fulfill his role as head-of-household to send Jacob away and marry an appropriate wife from his mother's house. While Rebekah at the end of Gen. 27

within the literary context of Genesis, Isaac's blindness seems to be something that happens because Isaac has become old. The text does not concern itself with a theological cause, nor does Isaac's blindness get presented as disabling Isaac as a social character in his community.

When we turn to *Jubilees*, we notice narrative expansions in the Isaacic tradition. In *Jubilees* 26, a parallel story to the one found in Genesis 27, Isaac states that he has grown old and now has difficulty seeing (*Jub.* 26.1). The immediate context – both before and after – is the blessing of Jacob (first by Rebekah, then by Isaac). In the story, God is involved in Jacob's blessing by distracting Isaac's mind during the episode (*Jub.* 26.17-18).³²⁶ Like Genesis, Isaac's blindness does not preclude his functioning in his assigned societal roles: as father, he still offers a blessing to his sons and commands Jacob to leave the house; Jacob still expects Isaac as a priest to sacrifice at Bethel (see Chapter One).³²⁷ Thus, blindness is not a disability in Isaac's quotidian life.

Jubilees witnessed an innovation to the tradition of Isaac's blindness: Isaac's blindness is temporary. In *Jubilees* 31, Jacob brings Judah and Levi with him to see his father when Isaac requests Jacob visit before Isaac's death. Isaac is in his bedroom lying down when Jacob enters with his sons. Then "the shadow passed from Isaac's eyes and he saw Jacob's two sons" (*Jub.* 31.9) Following this, Isaac receives a spirit of prophecy into his mouth (*Jub.* 31.12). At this point in *Jubilees* the narrator reports that Isaac is 165

seems to arrange the situation by first commanding Jacob to go and then by asking Isaac to send him away, thus show she has a certain amount of power in the familial relations, the ability to send Jacob away seems, at the point of departure, to reside with Isaac.

³²⁶ *Jubilees* does not indicate that God is or is not involved in Isaac becoming blind.

³²⁷ In Isaac's refusal to go to Bethel, even after his vision returns, one is able to see that it is old age and not Isaac's blindness that seems to be the issue for why he will not fulfill this role any longer.

(*Jub.* 31.27). According to *Jubilees* chronology, Isaac has another 15 years until his death. After this passage, no mention is made of Isaac's blindness returning. It is interesting that it is only *after* the shadow passes from Isaac's eyes that he receives the spirit of prophecy. The implication is that Isaac's body, when he was blind, was not a suitable abode for the spirit but the body with healthy eyes is.³²⁸ In this respect, the change of visual status from blind to sighted may signal the interior change of the person in order to making Isaac an acceptable host for the spirit.³²⁹

Philo³³⁰ portrayed Isaac as the ideal of one who is not concerned with his corporeal body. Rather, Isaac masters and transcends his physical body. He is self-taught, a master of the passions (*Prelim. Studies* 34-38). The patriarch taught himself and privately converses with God outside of his own self (*Alleg. Interp.* 3.43). Isaac does not converse with mere mortals but is guided by God (*Worse* 29-31). He lives an incorporeal life (*Alleg. Interp.* 2.59). Isaac leaves all the corporeal essence attached to his soul and becomes an inheritor and member of the immortal and most perfect *genos* of beings (*Sacrifices* 6-7). The patriarch is a soul united to virtue (*Posterity* 62). He sets aside pleasures of the flesh (*Migration* 29-30). Isaac loves wisdom and repudiates the outward sense of knowing his wife (*Cherubim* 40-41). These snapshots of Philo's Isaac give the

³²⁸ In referring to things as 'natural' or 'healthy' I do not mean to say this is how things are supposed to be, rather, the ableist discourse which inscribes and constructs normalcy that is attempting to obfuscate difference and power relations which determine what is 'normal' and what is 'problem'. For a further discussion on constructing normalcy, see Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 23-49.

³²⁹ While this may seem an odd notion, the exterior body indicating something about the interior of the person, ancient physiognomy presents this idea as science. Physical appearances could be read to decipher the traits of a person's soul. Thus, when Isaac changes his physical state from blindness to sight, it is not too far a stretch to suggest that this would be understood as a sign of his changed state within his soul.

³³⁰ Philo is a first century C.E. Jewish philosopher from Alexandria.

impression that Isaac's corporeal body does not interest Philo, except as something for Isaac to master and to transcend.

Nonetheless, Philo discussed the loss of Isaac's vision in Genesis. 27:1 in (*QG* 4.196). Philo found the literal interpretation plausible: Isaac becomes physically blind, allowing Isaac to give the blessing to Jacob (who Philo felt was the deserving son), then Isaac's eyesight returns. Philo viewed the physical blindness as a short, temporary change in visual status, the result of divine intervention. In this explanation, Philo differed from *Jubilees*, where Isaac is already blind due to old age and God's intervention is to lead Isaac's mind astray.

Philo preferred the allegorical meaning of the passage. Philo interpreted eye failure in old age to be a sign of change and transformation in a person. As part of this change, the soul would begin to see what it had not previously seen, such as God, and it would be able to have keener sight toward intelligible things. So, as eye failure occurs in the material realm, Philo imagined the soul to begin to see truer things. According to Philo, this other kind of sightedness is a preparation for prophecy, when the person becomes the instrument that God plays. Isaac's blindness prepares him to fulfill God's divine plan by allowing him to begin to see God's truth. Unlike in *Jubilees* where Isaac regains his sight before prophesying, Philo understands that Isaac's physical blindness, temporary though it is, allows for prophesying to occur through Isaac. Isaac's blindness makes it possible for the divine to be seen more clearly and to enter into the material realm through Isaac.

Philo's attitude toward Isaac's blindness was ambiguous. On the one hand, Philo promoted the naturalness of failing eyesight at the end of life without passing a value

judgment on it. On the other hand, it is also the beginning of seeing intelligible things more keenly. Physical blindness is a positive in as much as it prepares Isaac to be able to see in the soul intelligible things. The implication of such a view is that blindness remains inferior to sightedness, since now the soul is able to see keener. Sightedness remains the valued visual state, even if it has been moved from the physical body to the soul.

In Josephus's parallel to Genesis 27 (*Ant.* 1.267-277) Isaac is blind with a disorder of his eyes that, along with his old age, prevents him from the sacrificial aspect of the worship of God.

But when he [Isaac] was old, and could not see at all, he called Esau to him, and told him, that besides his blindness and the disorder of his eyes, his very old age hindered him from his worship of God [by sacrifice].
(*Ant.* 1.267)

Isaac's blindness prevents him from fulfilling his role as sacrificer. Although Josephus was not explicit in the reason Isaac no longer is the sacrificer, it seems that he does not sacrifice because of his functional limits relating to his blindness. This functional barrier would disable the patriarch from performing the communal role of sacrificer. Josephus, however, did not treat Isaac's blindness as a barrier to him fulfilling other social roles besides that of sacrificer. When the patriarch has the strength (a different issue than his eyesight), he is able to fulfill his social role as head-of-household when he blesses his son.

Blindness, in Josephus' portrayal of Isaac, goes hand and hand with getting old and approaching death. Blindness in old age seems to be natural enough to Josephus that it did not receive further attention. Isaac is disabled in the sense that he was not able to

sacrifice any longer. Yet he is still able to carry on other roles as the head-of-household. As in Genesis, Isaac remains blind for the rest of his life.

In looking at the rabbinic literature, I will restrict my comments to the *Midrash Rabbah* and *Pesiqta Rabbati*.³³¹ The *Midr. Rab.* provides a copious source for interpretations of Isaac's blindness that are also witnessed on occasion in other midrashic and targumic sources. *Pesiq. Rab.* includes two interpretations that I did not find in the *Midr. Rab.* These examples reflect a variety of options for understanding Isaac's blindness available in the midrashic materials. There was not a consistent rabbinic understanding of Isaac's blindness. The Rabbis looked at the cause of Isaac's blindness and the effect of the change to blindness. In doing so, the Rabbis often stigmatized blindness, but they did not consider blindness necessarily to be a disability.

Midr. Rab. offers a variety of causes for Isaac's blindness. In *Gen. Rab.*, the Rabbis commented on Genesis 27:1. To explain Isaac's blindness, R. Isaac quoted Isaiah 5:23 ("who justifies the wicked for a reward...") and interpreted "and take away the righteousness of the righteous" as alluding to Moses and Isaac.

For 'the righteousness of the righteous' alludes to Moses, while 'and take away from him' alludes to Isaac: because he justified the wicked, his eyes grew dim, as it says, 'And it came to pass that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim'. (*Gen. Rab.* 65.5)

³³¹ Any parallels or similarities in the targumim or other midrashic materials will be noted in the footnotes. *Rabbah* means 'great'. *Pisqa* means 'chapter', *pesiqta* is the plural 'chapters'. *Pesiqta Rabbati* means the 'Great Chapters' and is a midrash compilation that focuses on liturgical occasions. *Midr. Rab.* is the name given to the great midrash compilations for the books of the Torah, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. While the midrash contained within these compilations may be earlier, the compilations themselves are probably from the late fourth century (*Gen. Rab.*) and later.

R. Isaac accused Isaac of being the one who justifies the wicked, when he justifies Esau. Apparently, R. Isaac views Isaac's love for Esau as justifying Esau, and Isaac's acceptance of Esau's venison gifts as the reward (cf. Gen. 25:28).

The Rabbis continued to view the cause of Isaac's blindness as his love of Esau and the acceptance of Esau's gifts (or, 'he justified the wicked') in the following paragraphs of *Gen. Rab.* R. Isaac used Exodus 23:8 ("you shall take no gift, for a gift blinds...") to further develop the idea and to offer it as an ethical guide.

If when one [Isaac] accepted gifts from a person who owed them to him, his eyes grew dim; how much more when you accept gifts from one that owes you naught! (*Gen. Rab.* 65.7)

The limitation of one's vision is punishment for justifying the wicked. Whether or not the wicked's gifts (Esau would offer Isaac gifts of meats) were family obligations, one ought not justify them and provide them with a blessing. In this explanation, blindness carries the stigma of punishment for sin.

There were, however, other alternatives the Rabbis suggested when reading this passage. R. Hanina b. Papa cited Psalm 40:6 ("Many things you have done, O LORD my God..."):

All the works and thoughts which Thou hast wrought have been toward us for our sake. Thus, why did Isaac's eyes grow dim? So that Jacob might come and receive the blessings. (*Gen. Rab.* 65.8)

In the interpretation, R. Hanina b. Papa viewed Isaac's blindness as the result of the divine plan to insure Jacob would receive the blessing.³³² Isaac's blindness is not

³³² The targums of Genesis also point to the divine intention, as "the holy spirit departed from him so that Jacob would receive the order of blessings." *Frg. Tg. Gen.* 27.1.

attributed to sin; rather it is part of God's plan so that something positive may occur. Blindness does not denote the patriarch's moral deficiencies and character.

In another interpretation, Isaac's blindness indicates potential inadequacies of Isaac that may merit punishment. R. Judah b. Simon attributed old age, suffering, and illness to requests made by the three patriarchs. The midrash provided an explanation for why old age, suffering, and illness are not mentioned in Genesis prior to Abraham (Gen. 24:1), Isaac (Gen. 27:1), and Jacob (Gen. 48:1), respectively. Isaac receives blindness because he requested to suffer.

Isaac demanded suffering, pleading thus: 'Sovereign of the Universe! When a man dies without previous suffering, the Attribute of Judgment is stretched out against him; but if Thou causest him to suffer, the Attribute of Judgment will not be stretched out against him.' Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: 'By thy life, thou hast asked well, and I will commence with thee.' Thus suffering is not mentioned from the beginning of the Book until here: And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim. (*Gen. Rab.* 65.9)

R. Judah b. Simon explained why Isaac is the first person in Genesis who suffered (Gen. 27:1). He interpreted the verse to be about the first instance of suffering in Genesis.³³³ In this interpretation, God causes Isaac's eyes to dim, and blindness is equated with suffering, but Isaac requests it so as not to face judgment at his death. Blindness becomes an instrument to alleviate punishment after death. As a mechanism of pre-emptive suffering, blindness works for ultimately a positive benefit. Yet, blindness is still a negative punishment. It is a kind of suffering and is the result of a person's sinfulness.

³³³ While we as readers may think that earlier characters in Genesis suffered, the rabbis view Isaac as the first person to suffer since Gen. 27:1 is supposed to be the first place suffering is mentioned.

Yet another rabbinic interpretation viewed Esau as the cause of Isaac's blindness not because of Isaac's actions toward Esau but on account of Esau's wickedness.³³⁴ Thus, the sins of the son cause the blindness of the father. This idea is captured in the words of R. Eleazar b. 'Azariah.

It means, from seeing the evil of that wicked man [Esau]. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'Shall Isaac go out into the market place and people say, "Here is the father of that scoundrel!" Rather I will make his eyes dim, so that he will stay at home'. (*Gen. Rab.* 65.10)

R. Eleazar used this example as a warning for teachers and parents who raise wicked disciples and children, that they will eventually suffer blindness. In Isaac's case, the blindness is the result of the son's sin, and while God is not doing it to punish the father, it does prevent him from participating in public life, an expected role for the head-of-household. As such, it is a disability. Isaac's blindness also carries a stigma of sin. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to raise righteous children. They suffer blindness when they raise the wicked.³³⁵

Another passage also indicates that blindness results in Isaac's withdrawal from public life. In *Gen. Rab.* 65.4 the Rabbis discussed what it means that Isaac is mentioned before Rebekah when it says that Esau's two wives "were a bitterness of spirit unto Isaac and Rebekah" in Genesis 26:35. In their reading, the Rabbis assumed that the order of

³³⁴ One passage in the *Midr. Rab.* retains an interpretation of Esau that is counter to all the others mentioned regarding Esau's association with Isaac's blindness. R. Simeon b. Gamaliel suggests that Esau was scrupulous when he honored his parents (*Deut. Rab.* 1.15). In recounting the episode, Isaac's blindness is treated without comment. No concern is made towards its cause, nor does Isaac face obstacles in performing his social role because of his visual status. It is Rebekah's and Jacob's deceit, in contrast to Esau's honor of his parents, which is significant. While it is silent about the cause of Isaac's blindness, in presenting a dutiful Esau, R. Simeon seems to offer a counter voice to blaming the son's sins on the father's blindness.

³³⁵ *Pesiq. de Rab Kah.*, Piska 3 contains a similar conclusion.

Isaac and Rebekah indicates the order in which the bitterness of spirit is experienced. The Rabbi's seem to have expected that Esau's wives should have been a bitterness of spirit to their mother-in-law first. Since this does not agree with the word order, the Rabbis try to determine the reason for the word order.

Another reason why to Isaac first: it is a woman's nature to sit at home and a man's to go out into the streets and learn understanding from people; but as his [Isaac's] eyes were dim he stayed at home; therefore to Isaac first. (*Gen. Rab.* 65.4)

In other words, since Isaac's blindness prevents him from fulfilling his gendered social role, he notices the bitterness of the daughters-in-law sooner than Rebekah. His blindness limits his access to leaving the house. In this situation, Isaac's blindness could be understood as a disability. Furthermore, by associating Isaac's blindness and his spatial restrictions with the woman's role to stay at home, the Rabbis implied that his blindness makes Isaac less manly, that is, blindness seems to carry a stigma of effeminacy.³³⁶

Other passages locate the cause of Isaac's blindness with the Akedah. Three possibilities emerge in association with Isaac's vision of the heavens during his binding. The first possibility is connected to the angels who watched. The tears of the angels caused Isaac's blindness.

For when our father Abraham bound his son Isaac, the ministering angels wept, as it says, 'Behold, their valiant ones cry without, the angels of peace weep bitterly': tears dropped from their eyes into his, and left their mark upon them, and so when he became old his eyes dimmed. (*Gen. Rab.* 65.10)

The second possibility is connected to Isaac seeing the Shekhinah.

³³⁶ While not exactly the same thing as blindness, it is interesting that the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomy*, identifies the weakness of eye as a sign of 'softness' and 'effeminacy' and also 'depression' or 'lack of spirit', cited in Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 33.

For when our father Abraham bound Isaac on the altar he lifted up his eyes heavenward and gazed at the Shekhinah. This may be illustrated by the case of a king who was taking a stroll by his palace gates, when looking up he saw his friend's son peering at him through a window. Said he: 'If I execute him now [for his disrespect] I will make my friend suffer; therefore, I will rather order that his windows be sealed up.' Thus when our father Abraham bound his son on the altar he looked up and gazed at the Shekhinah. Said the Holy One, blessed be He: 'If I slay him now, I will make Abraham, My friend, suffer; therefore I rather decree that his eyes should be dimmed'. (*Gen. Rab.* 65.10)

This second possibility views Isaac as committing an offense against God. It operates on the assumption that humans are not worthy to see the Divine Presence. When Isaac commits the offense, God's love for Abraham prevents God from meting out the punishment of death to Isaac. Rather, Isaac becomes blind. In this account, Isaac's blindness is the result of committing an offense against God. Blindness carries the stigma of sinfulness.

Third, *Deuteronomy Rabbah* also associates Isaac's blindness with the Akedah.

Unlike the previous possibility, the Rabbis suggested that Isaac believes his seeing the Shekhinah is a sign of Isaac's greatness.

Isaac said to Moses: 'I am greater than you, because I stretched out my neck upon the altar and beheld the Divine Presence.' Whereupon Moses replied to him: 'I am far superior to you; for your eyes become dim after beholding the divine presence.' Whence this? For it is written, "And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old and his eyes were dim from seeing." What is meant by, 'from seeing'? Because he had beheld the Divine Presence. 'But I spoke with the Divine Presence face to face, and yet my eyes did not become dim. And what is more, the skin of my face shone,' as it is said, "That Moses knew not that the skin of his face sent forth beams." (*Deut. Rab.* 11.3)

This passage does not identify Isaac's blindness with an offense against the Shekhinah.³³⁷ Rather, Moses' proclamation implies that Isaac's blindness is intended as a lesson to teach him humility. In comparison to Moses, Isaac's blindness indicates his inferior status. Isaac's blindness is stigmatized but it is not a punishment for Isaac committing an offense against God like in the previous passage.

Two additional understandings that are found in *Pesiq. Rab.* but not in the *Midr. Rab.* deserve mention. First, when teaching about the sins Esau committed against his fathers (Ps. 109:14), R. Tanhuma Berabbi discussed Esau's sin against Isaac:

He sinned against his father – he went and married idol-worshipping women who burned incense before the idols, and Isaac smelled the smoke, with the result that his eyes grew dim, as is said, “and his eyes grew dim.” (*Pesiq. Rab.*, Piska 12)

In this passage, others' acts of idolatry can affect the visual status of a parent. While it is another who commits idolatry, it is Isaac who becomes blind. Blindness remains linked to sin. It carries the social stigma of sinfulness. Second, in explicating how Esau also sinned against his mother, R. Nehemiah indicated the Isaac's blindness is a disability.

What was the sin against his mother? That because of him her body, when she died, had to be taken out at night. Indeed she herself asked that this be done, saying: My son, the righteous Jacob, is not here. My husband, the righteous Isaac, stays at home because his eyes are grown dim. If I be taken out during the day with this wicked one walking before my bier, it will be said, “Alas for the breast that gave suck to such a one.” Therefore she commanded that her body be taken out at night, although usually, when Matriarchs died, their bodies were taken out during the day, they were given a public funeral, and all came and accorded them loving reverence. (*Pesiq. Rab.*, Piska 12)

³³⁷ The Akedah tradition in the targums also suggests that Isaac's eyes dimmed from Isaac seeing the perfection of the heavens. *Geneziah Manuscripts of the Palestinian Targums Exod. 12.42*; *Geneziah Manuscripts of the Palestinian Targums Lev. 22.27*; *Frg. Tg. Lev. 22.7*; *Frg. Tg. Exod. 12.42*; *Tg. Ps.-J. Gen. 27.1*; *Tg. Neof. Exod. 12.42*.

Blindness prevents Isaac from participating in social roles that occur outside of the house. In this case, the effect of Isaac's blindness is that he could not fulfill the duty of leading his wife's funeral procession.³³⁸

The Rabbis offered a variety of explanations for why Isaac became blind. On a few occasions, the effect of Isaac's blindness leads to his withdrawal from public life. Isaac's blindness occasionally affects his ability to fulfill his social roles as head-of-house, but not always. It is not uncommon for the Rabbis to stigmatize Isaac's blindness, often associated with the sins of Esau, but also Isaac's sins. Yet Isaac's blindness is also viewed positively in connection with the Akedah and Isaac's actions at that time.

When we turn from the Rabbis to early Christian interpreters, Isaac's blindness does not appear to be a major concern of the Alexandrian fathers, or other early Eastern church fathers for that matter. While Genesis 27:1 is quoted on many occasions, attention turns quickly to the blessing and the two sons. Nonetheless, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-c.395) mentioned Isaac's eyesight, or lack thereof, and offered a more contemplative and ascetic spin to his visual status than do most of the Second Temple and rabbinic interpreters.

In his *Homilies on Genesis*, Origen did not mention Isaac's blindness. Nonetheless, Origen's mention of Isaac's eyesight is relevant for my considerations of *T. Isaac* later in the chapter. Origen referred to Isaac's eyesight in *Contra Celsum* (6.4) – and in *Philocalia* (15.6)³³⁹ – in a context not concerned with his blindness, but rather with his eyesight. As part of a larger argument against the wise ones of Greece worshiping

³³⁸ *Pesiq. Rab Kah.*, Piska 3 contains a similar account.

³³⁹ As an anthology of Origen's texts, the *Philocalia* contains extracts from *Contra Celsum*.

God in error, Origen explained what Moses and the prophets meant when they wrote in scriptures that a few had seen God. Origen mentioned that Isaac (along with Abraham and Jacob) saw God, indicating his special status, but not with his bodily eyes (οὐ τοῖς τοῦ σώματος ὀφθαλμοῖς), but rather with his pure heart (τῇ καθαρᾷ καρδίᾳ).

As the wise and learned among the Greeks, then, commit errors in the service they render to God, God ‘chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and base things of the world, and things that are weak, and things which are despised, all things which are for not, to bring to not things that are’ and this, truly, ‘that no flesh should glory the presence of God’. Our wise men, however – Moses, the most ancient of them all, and the prophets who followed him – knowing that the chief good could by no means be described in words, were the first who wrote that God manifests Godself to the deserving, and to those who are qualified to behold [God], [God] appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob. But who [God] was that appeared, and in what form, and in what manner, and the like to which of mortal beings, they have left to be investigated by those who are able to show that they resemble those persons to whom God showed Godself: for [God] was seen not by their bodily eyes, but by the pure heart. For according to the declaration of our Jesus, ‘Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God’. (*Cels.* 6.4)

The portrayal of Isaac’s visual status is particularly interesting for *T. Isaac*. We find in Origen a third century witness that had Isaac seeing but not with his physical eyes. Isaac’s “seeing” is associated with his pure heart, indicating his privileged status as one to whom the audience ought to listen and as one worthy of imitation. Even though Origen shifted the meaning of seeing from physical to spiritual, Origen did not shift the value of seeing. Seeing God through one’s pure heart remains the ideal. Sight is a positive visual status.

In *On Virginity*, Gregory of Nyssa praised Isaac’s virtue. Unlike Origen, Gregory discussed Isaac’s blindness. He interpreted Isaac’s blindness not as a physical blindness,

but as an ascetic act in which Isaac closes off his senses in order to live in the world unseen.

There was the example of the patriarch Isaac who did not marry at the peak of his youth, in order that marriage should not be a deed of passion; but when his youth was already spent, he married Rebecca because of the blessing of God upon his seed. He continued in the marriage until the birth of his twin sons, and later, closing his eyes, he entered again fully the realm of the unseen. This is what the story of the patriarch seems to mean, in my opinion, when it refers to the failing of his sight. (*On Virginity*, 7.3)

There is, then, a preference for living in the world of the unseen. Physical blindness does not prevent one from being able to live in the preferred world of the unseen. Isaac's visual status was praiseworthy and an example for Gregory's audience to emulate. Yet, in turning Isaac's blindness into a metaphor, Gregory removed it from the physical experience of blindness. Isaac's blindness is something he could suspend to perform social roles, such as being a husband and father. Gregory's attitude suggests that people who are blind are not fit to marry and have children. Isaac's blindness is praiseworthy because he chooses to live in the world unseen. Physical blindness, on its own, did not receive Gregory's praise; rather, his attitude toward physical blindness seems to be negative.

In summary, there was a wide diversity for understanding Isaac's blindness. Two interpretations reviewed had Isaac regain his sight, the tradition of the double change. In *Jubilees*, the restoration of sight happens after years of Isaac's blindness. In Philo, Isaac regains his sight after the blessing of Jacob. In both cases, there is a divine will involved in guaranteeing Jacob receives the blessing and in Isaac's sight returning. *Jubilees* connected the restoration of eyesight to the gift of prophecy. Philo had Isaac prophesy prior to his renewed eyesight, but Philo did so by means of allegorical interpretation.

While Isaac remains the head-of-household for his family who fulfills his social role in the blessing of Jacob, interpreters often portrayed Isaac's blindness as a disability. Isaac is not able to perform other social roles on account of his blindness. In Josephus, he is no longer able to fulfill his role as sacrificer. In the midrashic literature, Isaac is confined to the home, unable to fulfill his role as the patriarch of the family in public life, or for his wife's the funeral procession.

Some of the interpreters stigmatized blindness in their accounts. Perhaps most prominent, the interpreters associated blindness with death. This interpretation follows from Genesis 27:1 and is found widely. In restricting Isaac to the house, as in the midrashic literature, Isaac is marked as less manly since blindness is seen as a reason that prevents him from entering the public space conceived a male gendered place. The rabbinic interpreters also stigmatized blindness when they associated it with sin and suffering.

In looking for the cause of Isaac's blindness, sin and Esau figure prominently in the rabbinic interpretations. The blindness is a sign of Isaac's sin because he justified the wicked and accepted gifts from the wicked Esau. Some interpreters viewed Isaac's blindness as a sign of Esau's sin. For some interpreters, blindness carried with it a sense of suffering, a substitute for the much worse judgment one receives at death. Some thought Isaac's blindness is the result of his looking into the heavens when he was bound on the altar. In one telling, the angels' tears fell in his eyes, leading to the blinding. It could also be the result of seeing the Shekhinah. The resulting blindness in this case is either divine punishment, or a more neutral something that can happen.

Finally, both Origen and Gregory valued Isaac's ability to see in the realm of the unseen. For Origen, this realm was seen through the pure heart, not with the bodily eyes. For Gregory, the realm was seen through the denial of the physical senses. The trajectory of their interpretation, likely going back to Philo's, held Isaac up as a model of the contemplative ascetic, concerned with seeing God in the realm of the unseen.

3.4 Isaac as Blind Ascetic in *Testament of Isaac*

In the midst of Isaac announcing his pending death to his household, the writer of *T. Isaac* inserted an account of Isaac's eyesight being lost for one hundred years and then restored at the end of his life.³⁴⁰

But our father Isaac made a bedroom for himself in his house. When the light of his eyes became heavy, he retired into it until the end of one hundred years. He fasted until evening daily; he offered up on behalf of himself and his household a young animal for their soul; and he spent half the night praying and blessing God. And he continued in this manner for one hundred years. And he kept fasts which were drawn out over three forty day periods each year, neither drinking wine nor eating fruit nor sleeping upon a bed. And he gave thanks to God and he prayed. When the crowd realized that the man of God was able to see, they gathered to him from everywhere. They listened to the teachings of his life. They knew that it was the holy spirit of God which spoke in him. The great ones who came to him said to him, "You are able to see. How has this matter happened, since the light of your eyes was difficult and yet you are able to see?" And the God-loving old man smiled in laughter, and he said to them, "My sons and my brothers, the God of my father Abraham caused this to happen, to comfort me in my old age." (*T. Isaac* 4.1-9)

Isaac spends the one hundred years during which he is blind as an ascetic priest for his family. Yet, almost immediately after the narrator characterizes Isaac as a blind ascetic, Isaac's eyesight is restored, people beyond his household come to hear his words,

³⁴⁰ Isaac's blindness is not mentioned in the Bohairic but the restoration of his sight is. Gaselee. "Appendix Containing a Translation from the Coptic Version of the Testaments of Isaac and Jacob," 56.

and he is taken up into the heavens for a tour. I argue that Isaac's visual status³⁴¹ and his change in visual status in a direction that opposes the 'natural' progression of eyesight limitations in old age indicates the divine favor. The change in Isaac's visual status back to sightedness serves to establish Isaac as a superior character, one who the textual community of *T. Isaac* was to imitate and to obey. The restored, 'healthy' eyes signal that Isaac's way of living was a model for the textual community to follow. Besides being a model, Isaac is an authoritative teacher (in the narrative and for *T. Isaac*'s textual community) whose words of wisdom carry divine truth now that he is able to see.

In *T. Isaac* 4.1-9, Isaac's visual status reflects an attitude toward blindness that allowed one who is blind to be included in the performance of asceticism and other acts of piety. At the same time, the passage implies that seeing is superior to blindness in both human popular opinion and divine judgment. *T. Isaac*'s representation of Isaac as a blind priestly ascetic suggests that Isaac is able to continue to fulfill a social role as the head-of-household. Isaac offers sacrifices for his family (*T. Isaac* 4.2).³⁴² Isaac is fulfilling his duties as the head-of-household when he makes sacrifices for them. He also fulfills the role of the priest when he offers sacrifices. As I argued in Chapter One above, Isaac is the priest for his generation. In Leviticus 21:17-23, a priest is prohibited from serving God an offering if he has a variety of physical deformities or blemishes, including blindness. The reason for the prohibition is that the blemish will profane the sanctuary. While a priest who is blind is not allowed to serve God, nor come near the altar, God does permit these

³⁴¹ For example, blind, limited vision, near sighted, far-sighted, and other statuses along the spectrum.

³⁴² James noted this portrayal is similar to Job's sacrifices in Job 1:5 and Abraham in *Jub.* 16. James, *The Testament of Abraham*, 157.

disqualified priests to eat the priestly portion. Yet, in *T. Isaac*, Isaac's blindness does not face the prohibitions concerning priests in Leviticus 21:17-23.³⁴³ Rather, Isaac's blindness becomes a site for listing Isaac's priestly ascetic practices. Isaac fasts, makes offerings, spends the nights praying to God and praising God, and does not sleep on his bed. These practices would have been familiar to ascetics in early Egyptian Christianity.

Isaac's blindness, however, was not the ideal status for ordinary human eyesight, nor even a preferred status, in *T. Isaac*. In Isaac's interactions after his eyesight returns, Isaac is now understood to have the holy spirit of God speak through him. Besides his household, Isaac's audience does not gather around him and listen to what he has to say until he is able to see. The implication is that Isaac was not perceived as having authority when he was blind. Isaac credits God with providing this eyesight. God decides to bring Isaac comfort in his last days. In the narrative, God's judgment is understood to be that eyesight brings comfort. The implication is that one who is blind is not in comfort and thus needs divine assistance to receive comfort. Here, *T. Isaac* reinscribed the ableist discourse in which vision is good, blindness is not-good, and stigmatized those who are blind as not receiving God's favor. Human opinion and God's judgment reveal eyesight to be a positive attribute and blindness to be a negative, or at least a lesser, attribute.

The attitude towards Isaac's visual status reflects the slippery notions of disability and impairment. At some points, blindness is just a natural condition, one possible option for a person's visual status. People go about and perform their social roles as best they

³⁴³ One way to respond to *T. Isaac* not prohibiting Isaac from making sacrifices like Leviticus did for priests who were blind is to point out that the writer viewed Isaac as a priest prior to the giving of Leviticus, and, like other ancestral priests, did not have the same priestly rules when it came to who could and could not perform sacrifices.

can. Yet, there is also a sense that, in a culture that privileges eyesight, blindness is different from the norm, and the difference causes blindness to be stigmatized. From the ableist point of view, a person who is not able to see is lacking comfort.

In *T. Isaac* 4.1-9, Isaac's blindness is not always a disability. Yet it does stigmatize how Isaac is perceived in the narrative. Thus, the change of status reveals Isaac's divine favor and the authority of his words.

Having looked at *T. Isaac* 4.1-9, I now turn to Isaac's visual status for the overall narrative of *T. Isaac*. The mention of Isaac as a blind ascetic is a flashback, which interrupts the narrative's timeline.³⁴⁴ Isaac's death occurs on the twenty-fourth of Mesore (*T. Isaac* 1.1), mere days after the angel's announcement on the twenty-second of Mesore (*T. Isaac* 2.1).³⁴⁵ The flashback, then, begins at least one hundred years prior, likely expecting the audience to associate it with the time of Genesis 27. "But our father Isaac made a bed for himself in his house, when the light of his eyes became heavy, he retired into it until the end of one hundred years" (*T. Isaac* 4.1). This verse is familiar to other interpretations that take the dimming of Isaac's eyes in Genesis 27:1 and associate it with

³⁴⁴ A flashback, using the technical terminology of narrative theorists, is called 'analepsis'. Analepsis is "any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the story where we are at any given moment." There are three kinds of analepsis based on its reach – the temporal distance for the 'present' moment in the narrative – and extent – the duration of the story: external (reaches into the past and its extent is external to the main narrative), internal (reach is back within the main narrative and extent is within the main narrative), mixed (reaches into the past, prior to the main narrative and its extent arrived at after the beginning of the main narrative). G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (trans. Lewin; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), 48-49, quote on 40.

³⁴⁵ Otherwise, there would be a one hundred year lag between the angel's announcement of Isaac's immanent death and Isaac's soul coming out from the body. Given the immediacy of the narrative for Isaac's death, I doubt that one ought to draw a conclusion other than the main narrative is over three days. Yet this is precisely what Kuhn implies, "Isaac's household assembles around him, but his death is delayed and he continues to live an ascetic life." Kuhn, "Coptic Testament of Isaac," 612. Needless to say, I think Kuhn has misread the narrative's chronology. There is not a hundred year delay.

Isaac retiring (being confined) to the house.³⁴⁶ The difference between *T. Isaac* and other interpretations, however, is that Isaac lives an ascetic life during the hundred years while other interpreters treat blind Isaac as an invalid who is housebound.

The narrative leaves room for interpreting when God restores Isaac's eyesight.³⁴⁷ I read *T. Isaac* as saying that Isaac is physically blind until just before the narrative that mentions the audience noticed Isaac's vision was restored (*T. Isaac* 4.5). So, Isaac is physically blind when the angel arrives. Here, Isaac "sees" the angel, but, I suggest, this seeing is not a physical seeing.

He [Isaac] lifted up his face to the face of the angel. He saw him, he took the likeness of his father Abraham. And his mouth opened and he raised his voice; and he cried out in great joy, 'I saw your face like one who has seen the face of God' (*T. Isaac* 2.4).

Following the angel's greeting, Isaac responded: "I am astonished by you; you are my father" (*T. Isaac* 2.9). After their discussion, the angel went back to the heavens, "while our father Isaac gazed at him" (*T. Isaac* 3.1). This account reflects a vision. The narrator mentions, "He [Isaac] marveled at the vision which he saw" (*T. Isaac* 3.1). Furthermore, at the beginning of the episode the narrator notes in an aside: "And it was the righteous old man Isaac's custom daily to speak with the angels" (*T. Isaac* 2.3). It is an ordinary

³⁴⁶ The *Testament* already assumes that the audience knows the biblical story in Genesis 27, and that it occurred in the past, when Isaac says to the angel he is worried about what Esau will do to Jacob, "you know the story" (*T. Isaac* 2.14).

³⁴⁷ Genette suggests that whether the analepsis is external or internal or mixed leads to the passage functioning differently. For example, the external analepsis fills in information for the main narrative, but it does not interrupt the narrative. If Isaac already has had the second change in visual status before the beginning of the *Testament of Isaac*, Genette would say its "function is to fill out the first narrative by enlightening the reader on one or another 'antecedent'." This is the *only* function Genette claims external analepsis may have. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 50.

If, however it is mixed, then it should be considered how the analepsis rejoins the narrative to determine the function. If the juncture is at the point I am suggesting, the analepsis provides the reader with necessary information regarding an antecedent, however in coming into the main narrative, the second change accounts for Isaac's audience.

event for Isaac to speak with the angels. In the interpretations mentioned above, Philo and Gregory attributed Isaac's physical blindness to the trait of contemplating, seeing the things in the realm of the unseen. Origen distinguished between seeing with the bodily eyes and seeing with the pure heart. While the writer of *T. Isaac* may not have drawn directly from Philo, Origen, and Gregory, their treatment of Isaac's visual status in relation to contemplation suggests a tradition that may have been available in the Egyptian monastic context that would have allowed *T. Isaac*'s textual community to connect Isaac's visit with the angel to his contemplative practice.

After the event, Isaac states, "I will not see the light until I am sent for" (*T. Isaac* 3.2). One may want to argue that this statement indicates that Isaac will no longer be able to physically see beginning at this point, and thus the hundred years of asceticism starts now. That interpretation, however, ignores the connection of Isaac's blindness to the events of Genesis 27 that *T. Isaac* implied have occurred already.³⁴⁸ It also ignores that only three days elapse between the visit of the angel, and Isaac's death.

In my reading, *T. Isaac* 3.2 means that Isaac realizes that he must take a break from his practice of contemplative seeing into the realm of the unseen. Gregory of Nyssa had Isaac stop being blind, that is, take a break from his ascetic contemplation, so that he could be a husband and father. Something similar occurs in *T. Isaac*'s narrative. In order to follow the angel's exhortations to get his affairs in order, write his testament, and give final words to his household, Isaac has to pause his contemplation of the divine realm in order to do what is required in the physical realm. After this is accomplished, and God

³⁴⁸ In *T. Isaac* 2.14, Isaac asks the angel, "What shall I do about the light of my eyes, my beloved son Jacob? For I am afraid of what Esau might do to him – you know the situation."

sends for him, Isaac will be able to return to seeing the light, that is, the divine realm, because he no longer has responsibilities in the physical realm.

Isaac's pause in his contemplative life to fulfill his responsibilities in the physical realm is important for the image of Isaac as a blind ascetic. It teaches the reader that one cannot live a completely isolated life of contemplation. Isaac has the responsibility to pass down the wisdom he acquired as well as to set his familial affairs in order. For *T. Isaac's* textual community, Isaac's model shows that the contemplative life was not an excuse avoid passing down wisdom, or fulfilling familial responsibilities. In the Egyptian monastic context, lay pilgrims from around the Mediterranean visited especially holy monks and interrupted their contemplative lives. Isaac's example suggests that the monk should not ignore the visitor but should share his wisdom.

To return to the flashback, some hundred years prior to the events of the narrative Isaac became blind. During the hundred years when Isaac was blind, *T. Isaac* portrayed Isaac as an ascetical priest who visited daily with angels. At the end of the hundred years, Isaac is once again able to see in the physical sense. The return of Isaac's eyesight causes a sufficient stir to bring the crowds to the dying patriarch (*T. Isaac* 4.5).

The changing of Isaac's status is a narrative device for revealing his character. Prior to encountering the flashback, the writer of *T. Isaac* did not find it necessary to inform the reader that Isaac is physically blind. The writer of *T. Isaac* placed the flashback in the narrative after Isaac's household hears he is about to die (*T. Isaac* 3.21), and immediately before an audience beyond Isaac's household gathers to him (*T. Isaac* 4.5). The visual status functions as a narrative prosthesis. A narrative prosthesis is a technique where the writer uses a figure's impairment metaphorically to say something

about the figure's character.³⁴⁹ In *T. Isaac*, the change designates to those who gather to Isaac that his words are authoritative, divinely inspired truths.

The importance of Isaac's visual status for the narrative, especially the change back to sighted, is reflected in the people's response to the change. Immediately after the discussion of Isaac's asceticism and the return of his eye sight, *T. Isaac* states:

When the crowd realized that the man of God was able to see, they gathered to him from everywhere. They listened to his teachings of life. They knew that it was the holy spirit of God which spoke in him. (*T. Isaac* 4.5)

This reaction is telling. It is only after Isaac visual status changes that the crowds appear.³⁵⁰ In *Jubilees*, Isaac's eyesight is restored and he is given the gift of prophesying. There is, then, within Isaac's tradition precedence for the return of Isaac's eyesight being associated with divine intervention. Negatively, in other accounts, Isaac's blindness was an indication that the Holy Spirit had departed from him. In both cases, interpreters read Isaac's visual status in relation to the divine. The writer of *T. Isaac* provided another known characterization of Isaac, this time to expand the make-up of the audience who gathers to the dying patriarch. Isaac's words are elevated to the level of divinely inspired truths of how one is to live. The elevation of his words would have invited the textual community of *T. Isaac* to hear his words in the chapters that follow (*T. Isaac* 4-7) in a like manner.

³⁴⁹ There are a myriad of relationships between literary and the historical that Mitchell and Snyder try to get at by employing this term. "First, narrative prosthesis refers to the pervasiveness of disability as a device of characterization in narrative art." I am using the term in this sense. Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 9.

³⁵⁰ Here, the Arabic version seems to mislead James in understanding the verse. He concludes that "the meaning seems to be that the rumour of the appearance of Michael had been spread abroad. It seems plain that all the events narrated are supposed to take place immediately before the death of Isaac." James, *The Testament of Abraham*, 158.

Yet, it is not just the ordinary crowds that gather to Isaac after his vision is restored. The highest ranks of society come to inquire of him.

The great ones who came to him said to him, “You are able to see. How has this matter happened, since the light of your eyes was difficult and yet you are able to see?” And the God-loving old man smiled in laughter. He said to them, “My sons and my brothers, the God of my father Abraham caused this to happen, to comfort me in my old age.” (*T. Isaac* 4.6-7)

At this point, Isaac’s sightedness establishes him of equal stature to the great ones (νοσ, being used as a substantive adjective for the elites or elders) that have come to him. His response to them is not one of a social inferior, but of a father (superior) and a brother (equal). Even the priest of God comes to ask Isaac’s wisdom, referring to Isaac as father (*T. Isaac* 4.8) indicating that Isaac is a superior figure to him. Thus, Isaac’s audience and their response to Isaac’s new visual status establish him as a divinely inspired great one. His words are to be listened to as if directly from God. With Isaac’s character determined, the narrative now moves on to Isaac sharing his priestly wisdom, the paraenetic material for priests and monks alike, and the report of his other-worldly journey.

More than indicating Isaac as a speaker of divinely inspired words, the change of Isaac’s visual status to sighted is an external sign of the divine favor that God bestowed upon God’s beloved to comfort him in his final days. Isaac’s way of life becomes a model for ascetic piety confirmed by this sign of God’s favor. By sandwiching Isaac’s asceticism between the blindness and sightedness, the narrator shows Isaac’s devotion to God. Isaac is a righteous figure, beloved of God, whose piety is unimpeachable. Isaac’s ascetic practices are to be imitated. Gregory’s interpretation of Isaac also set him as an

ascetic model to imitate. But, the writer of *T. Isaac* used Isaac's double change (from sighted, to blind, to sighted) in visual status to confirm Isaac's way of life as the ideal – something that is missing from Gregory's understanding. The double change allows for God to demonstrate in a manner beyond words. If Isaac's visual status remained blind, a different divine confirmation in the narrative would be necessary to indicate that Isaac's life is worthy of imitation. There was already a tradition of the double change witnessed in Philo and *Jubilees*, from which the writer of *T. Isaac* was able to adopt for this purpose. In *Jubilees*, the return of Isaac's eyesight as the second change characterizes Isaac as one who speaks with divine authority. Like in *Jubilees*, the writer of *T. Isaac* used the second change to signal Isaac's words have divine authority. The writer of *T. Isaac* expanded on the tradition in *Jubilees* by using the double change to bracket Isaac's asceticism. In the process, his asceticism becomes a model for the *T. Isaac*'s textual community to follow.

Finally, the writer of *T. Isaac* did not limit Isaac's ascetic role on account of his blindness. The writer did not suggest whether or not his blindness was a benefit for him. Although blindness is viewed as a type of suffering in Isaac's conversation with the great ones, the writer of *T. Isaac* did not associate blindness with ascetic suffering – where a monk inflicted punishment on his own body to bring it under submission and to purify the soul.³⁵¹ Nonetheless, Isaac's blindness is not a barrier to fulfilling an ascetic role. In such a context, blindness is not a disability.

In the narrative of *T. Isaac*, however, the crowds that gather after Isaac regains his eyesight stigmatize Isaac's blindness. The implication is that Isaac was disabled in

³⁵¹ Crislip. "'I Have Chosen Sickness'."

relation to the larger community and he was not able to fulfill the role of a public teacher of divine and sacerdotal wisdom as long as he was blind. It is only with the removal of the blindness that the community treats Isaac as someone who has such kinds of wisdom to offer them.

T. Isaac treated Isaac's blindness ambiguously. Much of this ambiguity is the result of Isaac's different social roles. While he is blind, Isaac is able to fulfill his duties as the head-of-household. While he is blind, Isaac is able to fulfill his social roles as a priestly ascetic. The one social role Isaac is not able to fulfill before his eyesight is restored is spokesperson for the Holy Spirit and teacher of wisdom to those outside of his household. In this case, the larger community disables Isaac on account of his blindness. The different community and a different social role impact how Isaac's blindness is viewed.

3.5 Conclusion

In sum, Isaac's visual status helps to establish Isaac's character. Isaac is both a divinely inspired authority and an ascetic model to be imitated. The writer of *T. Isaac* seems to have drawn on traditions that are known elsewhere, especially *Jubilees*, and an interpretative trajectory going through Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. Yet there is not evidence of direct borrowing from these works. Rather, the writer of *T. Isaac* tweaked the tradition of the double changed visual status and connected it to Isaac's priestly asceticism to push the textual community's understanding of Isaac and to invite them to an alternative subjectivity.

Isaac as a blind ascetic would have resonated with *T. Isaac's* textual community in early Egyptian monasticism. Isaac offered a model of a blind ascetic whose practices are esteemed and rewarded by God. He regularly meets with angels as part of his contemplative life. Isaac's blindness is not a barrier to his asceticism and does not carry the negative connotations that Evagrius and Shenoute assigned to blindness. Isaac as a blind ascetic challenges the view that an impairment indicates a deficiency in the monk's soul. It supports the view that some impairments have natural causes not related to the demonic or sin.

The final dimension of Isaac's model of the new self is Isaac as blind ascetic. This dimension encourages *T. Isaac's* textual community to view Isaac's life and practices as the proper ascetic model. In this world, monks were able to converse with the angels. Impairments did not prevent monks from living the ascetic life; in fact, impairments may have been a benefit to the monk. The ascetic did not complain about suffering; for the ascetics suffering was rewarded. By following Isaac's example, the textual community aspired to the new relationships with the angels and gained access to the ones in heaven.

The three characteristics of Isaac that I have discussed (Isaac as priestly authority, Isaac as sacrifice, and Isaac as blind ascetic) addressed the needs of *T. Isaac's* textual community within early Egyptian monasticism. For the monks of *T. Isaac's* textual community, Isaac became a model for a new subjectivity. Isaac as priestly authority modeled how the textual community was to negotiate the relationship between priest and monk. In addition, Isaac as priestly authority modeled purity and holiness that was essential for participation in the angelic service. Isaac as sacrifice contributed to the model the overall identity as children of Isaac for those willing to follow Isaac's advice.

Isaac's sacrifice also encourages obedience – just as Isaac was obedient in his willing sacrifice, so to the children of Isaac were obedient in their self-sacrificing entry into monastic life. Isaac as the blind ascetic set up Isaac as a model for the ascetic life. Isaac is able to perform his ascetic practices, and contemplate otherworldly experience, with the benefit of his blindness. Isaac does not allow the cares of the earthly realm to distract his contemplative ascetic life. Changing Isaac's visual status confirmed his ascetic way of life and the authority of his teachings for *T. Isaac's* textual community. In the final chapter, I will look at how the textual community read *T. Isaac* and how the textual community could have incorporated Isaac as a model for the new self into its ascetical practices.

Chapter 4

“Our Father Isaac”: Ascetic Practice and Communal Identity in *Testament of Isaac*

In the previous three chapters, I looked at the remembered tradition of Isaac that is found in the *T. Isaac*. *T. Isaac* portrayed Isaac in a manner that was limited by the tradition, but also an alternative to other portrayals within the tradition. The three important aspects of Isaac’s character that *T. Isaac* highlighted were relevant to the Egyptian monastic context. The monks of *T. Isaac*’s textual community developed this remembrance of Isaac into a model their new subjectivity as children of Isaac.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Flood informs my discussion of remembered traditions, especially as it relates to the textual community reading *T. Isaac* as an ascetical regimen. Flood relates ascetic subjectivities to remembered traditions. For Flood, tradition is a shared collective memory passed down through generations. A tradition is actively reconstructed in the present as a memory, and enlivens the present by linking it to the past. The textual community of *T. Isaac* received and constructed its tradition of Isaac. For Flood, memory is the capacity to conserve information deemed important by the community, often to legitimize power, collective identity, and individual formation. *T. Isaac* was a repository of information about Isaac that was important for legitimizing

the textual community's collective identity as children of Isaac and individual ascetic practices.³⁵²

In this chapter, I culminate the argument of this dissertation by arguing that *T. Isaac*'s textual community read *T. Isaac* as an ascetical regimen to cultivate a new subjectivity. First, I develop the textual community within an early Egyptian monastic context that I have mentioned throughout the dissertation. Then, I look at the ascetical regimen that might have been developed from *T. Isaac*. Since in *T. Isaac*, the ascetical regimen appears to be intended for the children of Isaac, I next examine what one does to acquire the communal identity. Finally, I look at how 'our father Isaac' serves as a model of the new self for the textual community. I will bring back the three dimensional model of Isaac discussed in Chapters 1-3 to discuss the subjectivity that the members of the textual community were striving to cultivate as children of Isaac.

4.1 *Testament of Isaac*'s Textual Community

Throughout the dissertation, I have suggested that *T. Isaac*'s textual community is best understood as an Egyptian monastic community. In doing so, I have begun to offer examples from monastic culture to contextualize the abstract textual community. Here, I hope to provide additional details for what the textual community might have looked like in the early Egyptian monastic context.

As we saw in Chapter One, the monk-clergy relationship of early Christian Egypt reveals a concern for who had authority in the monastic setting. The textual community would have found Isaac to be authoritative for mediating the monk-clergy relationship.

³⁵² Flood, *The Ascetic Self*, 8.

Since both monk and clergy were expected to live a monastic lifestyle and participate in the angelic worship of God, each was called to a heightened sense of purity and sinlessness in worship and in life. Both priest and monk should have learned from the holy man Isaac on how to offer sacrifice and how to live a holy life.

The textual community valued the virtue of holiness. In *T. Isaac* holiness appears to concern one's relation to God in opposition to the world and sin. Holiness and purity are closely connected terms. Yet, *T. Isaac* was often vague on what the terms mean. In the end, the vague notion of holiness leaves Isaac as the human standard for holiness. In early Egyptian monasticism, the Bible was the touchstone against which the holiness of people or places was measured.³⁵³ Monks found examples of holiness in the teachings and examples of biblical figures like Isaac. They studied the writings about the biblical figures to better understand how to pursue holiness. The vivid images of holy exemplars from scripture affected the imaginations of the desert monastics. As Douglas Burton-Christie says,

The particular concerns of the monks determined to a great extent which biblical figures most prominently and what values or virtues they were seen to embody. The figures selected and the themes associated with them thus provided a window through which we can observe those issues that were most significant in the desert and how these biblical exemplars were seen to have addressed these issues.³⁵⁴

Also, in late antiquity, people from around the Mediterranean went on pilgrimage to encounter the monks in hopes of gaining access to holiness and learn from the monks.

³⁵³ G. Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (TCH 30; ed. Brown; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 10.

³⁵⁴ D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 167.

The pilgrims expected the monks to conform to the holiness of biblical figures.³⁵⁵ While Burton-Christie and Georgia Frank emphasize that monks and pilgrims are using the Bible to determine what holiness is, I want to suggest that Bible may be too restrictive a list of books. Monastic libraries contained more works than those found in the Bible. Those texts could offer additional resources for the monks search for holiness. In particular, *T. Isaac* offers Isaac's teachings on holiness in his instructions to the priest of God.

In *T. Isaac* the Lord makes a promise to Abraham and Isaac concerning their children as a result of the sacrifice of Isaac. The textual community would have found resonance with this in the context of Egyptian monasticism. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the sacrifice of Isaac was invoked for the sacrifice that one makes to join a monastic community (like Abraham, one offers to sacrifice his children).³⁵⁶ At the same time, the monk was to identify with Isaac, who offers up his own life to God. The monastic life was a life of sacrifice, surrendering one's biological family and the earthly possessions for a new life with one's new monastic family. The monastic family was an alternative family to which the monk became a part through the performance of rituals. *T. Isaac's* textual community performed the memory of Isaac through prescribed rituals, on the day of Isaac's remembrance, to shore up its alternative family's holy genealogy.

The textual community was open to members who may have had physical differences that would have been barriers in other context. The example of Isaac as a blind ascetic implies that physical blindness was not a reason to dismiss a person from

³⁵⁵ Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes*, 29.

³⁵⁶ See pages 91-92 above.

the community. In fact, physical blindness might have assisted the monk to greater achievement in the spiritual quest for holiness, because the monk would not have been distracted as easily by what he saw in the physical realm. As I highlighted in Chapter Three, monastic communities found a way to include many monks of different abilities and limitations. For the sake of the community, the members were expected to work, but when that was not possible (as in the case of illness), exceptions were made to assist the monk and restore the monk to a condition that allowed them to continue the monastic life.³⁵⁷

The textual community had at least some monks who were literate and monks who worked as scribes.³⁵⁸ As will become clear later in the chapter, reading and writing are ascetic practices encouraged in *T. Isaac*. Examples of reading and scribalism in monastic settings help to ground the abstract textual community in early Egyptian monasticism.

I do not expect all of the monastics in *T. Isaac*'s textual community were able to read, at least in the sense of the individual cognitive process of decoding the symbols on a page. Yet, as a sociocultural system, reading encompassed more than this.³⁵⁹ Reading

³⁵⁷ See pages 140-41 above.

³⁵⁸ Cf. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*; Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert*.

³⁵⁹ William A. Johnson offers five propositions for thinking about reading as a sociocultural system: 1) "The reading of different types of texts makes for different types of reading events." 2) "The reading of a given text in different contexts results in different reading events." 3) "A reading event is in part informed by the conceived reading community." 4) "The reading community normally has not only a strict social component ... but also a cultural component, in that the rules of engagement are in part directed by inherited traditions." And 5) "Reading that is perceived to have a cultural dimension ... is intimately linked to the self-identity of the reader." Johnson prefers "to look at reading not as an act, or even a process, but a highly complex sociocultural system that involves a great many considerations beyond decoding by the reader of the words of a text." W.A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3-16 (quotes on 11-12).

included recitation from memory of a text while monks went about their day. Reading was also a social experience where monks read in public settings, such as at synaxis, and monks studying texts as a house. Even if the monk could not decode the symbols on a sheet of papyrus, he could participate in the reading culture of the monastic community.

The Pachomian communities offer an example of reading in the Egyptian monastic context. In the early Egyptian monastic context of the Pachomian communities, reading was a ritualized technology of the self. The monks' daily practice included the communal reading of the Bible. It served as a stimulus to prayer and to reflection. In the words of Philip Rousseau,

Monks would also recite texts while they worked (an activity described as *meditation*). They were constantly encouraged to discuss among themselves the reflections on scripture offered by their superiors, and as they moved from one duty to another in the monastery, they turned over texts of scripture in their heads.³⁶⁰

Within this environment, "Reflection upon scripture was to be the constant interior preoccupation of every member of the community and the most frequent topic of conversation."³⁶¹ Books were communal property, but monks were allowed to borrow a book for a week at a time. Pachomius' own engagement with scriptural texts was held up as a model for monks. In the training of monks, they had to memorize much of the Bible in order to be able to recite passages.

³⁶⁰ Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 81. See also, A. Veilleux. "Prayer in the Pachomian *Koinōnia*," in *The Continuing Quest for God: Monastic Spirituality in Tradition and Transition* (ed. Skudlarek; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 65.

³⁶¹ Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 103.

According to Gamble, “monastic libraries are attested as early as the fourth century in the Christian East.”³⁶² Gamble reasons from the rules of Pachomius and from the different versions of *Life of Pachomius* that books played an important role in the Pachomian communities. Since monks were expected to read and know scripture, Gamble deduces that the texts must have been available to the community. Gamble concludes that the monastic libraries contain more than books of scripture, since Pachomius refers to reading Origen’s works and various apocryphal books.³⁶³ The Nag Hammadi Codices may also indicate that the early Egyptian monks had libraries with diverse writings, whether or not the codices are to be associated with the Pachomians.³⁶⁴ Monastic communities were “accumulating, transcribing, storing, and using extensive collections of books.”³⁶⁵

Richter assumes that initially in the fourth and fifth century no general monastic library existed, rather the monks owned their own books. He thinks the initial impulse for a collection of books was a liturgical need.³⁶⁶ While the need for liturgical materials certainly seems important, I think the Pachomian evidence suggests that monks were using books for more than general liturgical usage. The books in the library would have provided the monks materials to meditate on and to study as part of the monks ascetic

³⁶² Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 170.

³⁶³ Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 170-71.

³⁶⁴ Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 171-72.

³⁶⁵ Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 173.

³⁶⁶ S.G. Richter. "Wadi al-Natrun and Coptic Literature," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Wadi al-Natrun: Essays from the 2002 International Symposium of the Saint Mark Foundation and the Saint Shenouda the Archmandrite Coptic Society* (eds. Mikhail and Moussa; Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2009), 48.

practice. Since the Pachomians allow for the borrowing of books, the monastic library seems to have resulted for the purpose of formation and study as well. Furthermore, since the Pachomians initially worship with priests at nearby churches, it is questionable how great their liturgical need was at first. Nonetheless, later monastic libraries do show a tendency toward liturgical usage.³⁶⁷

The textual community of *T. Isaac* did not limit authority to what moderns might consider the Bible. The words of God and the words of God's holy ones were both given authority. This would be consistent with other examples from early monasticism. In his study of the "desert hermeneutic," Douglas Burton-Christie argues that the Egyptian monastics gave authority to scripture and the words of the Desert Fathers.³⁶⁸ Furthermore, Derek Krueger suggests that the early Christians viewed the burgeoning genre of hagiography as authoritative.³⁶⁹ While the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and the various lives of the saints may not carry the same authority as scripture, they were nonetheless authoritative for those striving to live holy lives, these writings were viewed as a continuation of the story of the divine's ongoing presence in the world. The divine logos continued to be spoken through the saints and monks. The saints and monks continued the tradition of human participation in the conveying divine doctrine and ethical

³⁶⁷ The manuscript evidence that survives from the ninth century on, such as the Morgan collection in which the Sahidic version of *T. Isaac* is found, is predominantly liturgical. S. Emmel. "The Library of the Monastery of the Archangel Michael at Phantoou (al-Hamuli)," in *Christianity and Monasticism in the Fayoum Oasis: Essays from the 2004 International Symposium of the Saint Mark Foundation and the Saint Shenouda the Archmandrite Coptic Society in Honor of Martin Krause* (ed. Gabra; Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005); Richter. "Wasi al-Natron and Coptic Literature."

³⁶⁸ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 109.

³⁶⁹ D. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (eds. Boyarin, et al.; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

instructions found in scripture.³⁷⁰ I suggest that within this world, the words of other Holy Ones³⁷¹ – such as those found in so-called pseudepigraphic literature – would have been granted similar authority in as much as they were understood to represent the words of the righteous ones.³⁷² Ideally, *T. Isaac*'s textual community, those who wish to inherit the Kingdom of God, would treat *T. Isaac* as authoritative in a similar sense to how the early Christian hagiography and the *Apophthegmata Patrum* were considered authoritative. Such an attitude seems to be in mind in the prologue of *T. Isaac*: “God gives grace to these who believe the words of God and of his holy ones, they will be inheritors of the kingdom of God” (*T. Isaac* 1.6).

In the mid-fourth century C.E., as Kim Haines-Eitzen observes, an increase in the transcription and dissemination of texts occurred. She suggests this increase may have been a byproduct of asceticism and monasticism. The phenomenon of monasticism changed the notion of scribal copyist, “copying texts, and writing more generally, becomes an ascetic practice that raises one’s religious stature.”³⁷³ Scribal practices in late

³⁷⁰ For the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* see Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*. For hagiography see Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 62.

³⁷¹ A Holy One in the literary imagination of early monastic writings has some of the following characteristics. They have super-human relationships (with angels, demons, Jesus, God). Holy Ones perform miracles or signs. They prophesy. Holy Ones are known for their austerity and ascetic practices. They are teachers who apply the word of God in their lives. Holy Ones bear Christ in their lives. Their authority resides outside of the ecclesiastical structure. Representations of contemporary Holy Ones were modeled on the holiness of biblical figures considered to be holy. Thus, I use Holy Ones interchangeably for figures who were contemporary monastic manifestations – such as Onnophrius – and also figures from the distant past – such as Isaac.

³⁷² Claudia Rapp suggests, “hagiography may well be seen as scripture writ small.” C. Rapp. “Holy Texts, Holy Men, and Holy Scribes: Aspects of Scriptural Holiness in Late Antiquity,” in *The Early Christian Book* (eds. Klingshirn and Safran; *CUA Studies in Early Christianity*, ed. Rousseau; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 222.

³⁷³ K. Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 38-39.

antiquity were open to different classes, levels of literacy, and gender. Likewise, in monastic circles, women performed the role of scribes, copyists, and calligraphers.³⁷⁴

Monastic communities were centers of book productions. In the fourth century, monastic scriptoria were beginning to operate.³⁷⁵ The monastic scriptoria produced copies of books for the monastery, other monastic communities, laymen, and even non-Christians.³⁷⁶ Scriptoria helped to sustain monasteries financially, but also provided a context in which monks engaged texts as part of their ascetic practices.³⁷⁷

I do not think the scribes had limitless access to writing materials that allowed them to write without ceasing.³⁷⁸ The occurrence of such practices would be limited by the resources and the skills of community. Yet, *T. Isaac* privileged writing and reading as ascetic practices,³⁷⁹ suggesting that *T. Isaac*'s textual community was composed of at least some monks who were literate and were able to write.

³⁷⁴ Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature*, 41-52. See also, C. Kotsifou. "Books and Book Production in the Monastic Communities of Byzantine Egypt," in *The Early Christian Books* (eds. Klingshirn and Safran; *CUA Studies in Early Christianity*, ed. Rousseau; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 59.

³⁷⁵ Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 61. Haines-Eitzen thinks this development in the copying of Christian literary texts is linked to the legitimation and institutionalization of Christianity in the Roman Empire. The scriptoria are operating by the fifth century. Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature*, 132. Colin Roberts suggests that a Christian scriptorium at Oxyrhynchus in the late 2nd / early 3rd century is "not unlikely." C.H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt. The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1977* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 24.

³⁷⁶ Kotsifou. "Books and Book Production," 55.

³⁷⁷ C. Rapp. "Christians and Their Manuscripts in the Greek East in the Fourth Century," in *Scrittura libri e testi nelle aree provinciali di Bisanzio: atti del seminario di Erice (18-25 settembre 1988)* (1991), 133-36; Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 61; Rapp. "Holy Texts, Holy Men, and Holy Scribes," 208-12.

³⁷⁸ Even within the monastic community that had access to materials and scribal training, books were expensive to make. Kotsifou. "Books and Book Production," 60-63.

³⁷⁹ As I discuss below, the Lord allows those who write Isaac's testament or read Isaac's testament to become children of the patriarchs.

In terms of Christian ritual, the Eucharist had a special place for *T. Isaac*'s textual community. In *T. Isaac*, Isaac prophesies to Jacob about Christ installing the sacrament. Isaac mentions the mystery of the Eucharist, when the bread becomes the body of God and the wine becomes the blood of God. Isaac states that Christians will offer sacrifices without ceasing until the end of time. These sacrifices fend off the appearance of the antichrist. Isaac associates the Christian service as a type of the archetypal service in the heavens (*T. Isaac* 3.14-20).³⁸⁰ In these words, Isaac endorses the practice of the Eucharist and Christian sacrifices in the times of the textual community.³⁸¹ The last verse stresses the importance of the sanctity of the Christian service since is like that in the heavens. This prophecy, then, allows for Isaac to endorse this important Christian practice as part of the ascetical practices associated with the patriarch, even though Isaac is over forty generations removed from the incarnation of Christ in the narrative. *T. Isaac* did not explicitly mention any other Christian sacrament. Isaac mentions Christian sacrifices and ascetic practices but only the Eucharist is connected to the earthly life and teachings of Jesus. As I noted in Chapter One, monastic literature highlights the importance of priests for allowing monks to celebrate the Eucharist. It was a central ritual for the monastic communities to participate in the life of broader Christian community, but it was also a part of the holy worship that angels participated in – as witnessed by the angels bringing

³⁸⁰ The connection to the service in the heavens here and in Isaac's day could imply the need for one to maintain their purity in order to celebrate the Eucharist. Furthermore, I speculate that the confessional prayer Isaac gives to crypto-Levi could be understood as appropriate to be applied in the celebration of the Eucharist.

³⁸¹ Paphnutius, *Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt* §24, 43, 72, 76, 81; Paphnutius, *Life of Onnophrius* §17, 32; Pachmonian *Precepts* §15, 16; *Regulations of Horsiesios* §14; Bohairic *Life of Pachomius* §25 (and its parallel in the first Greek *Life of Pachomius* §27); and *Lives of the Desert Fathers* II.7-8, VIII.50, 56, 57, XII.6, XIII.4,8, XVI.1-2, XX.7, XXV.2.

the isolated monks the Eucharist when priests did not do so, and the angels standing with the priests as they served it.³⁸²

Theologically, *T. Isaac* reflects theological statements associated with emerging orthodoxy. As I discussed in the Introduction, *T. Isaac* contains multiple references to the Trinity (*T. Isaac* 2.16; 6.21; 8.7) and to Christ (*T. Isaac* 3.14-20; 6.31).

The first reference to the Trinity occurs in *T. Isaac* 2.16 when Isaac is concerned that Esau will do something to Jacob, the angel responds to Isaac, “When you blessed him [Jacob], the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit blessed him,” as well, so Jacob is not in danger. The second reference occurs in *T. Isaac* 6.21 when the Lord says, “my power and the power of my beloved son and the Holy Spirit shall be with them.” These two passage offers a notion of the Trinity in which the three persons of the Trinity are co-equals. The third reference occurs at the doxology of *T. Isaac*:

And they will come to the first hour of the thousand years, in accordance with the promise of our Lord, and our God and our Savior Jesus Christ, through whom every glory is due to him and his good Father and the Holy Spirit, the giver of life to all creation and one in the same being as them, now and always, forever and ever. Amen. (*T. Isaac* 8.7-8)

As a part of the Sahidic version, this doxology captures a Nicene-Constantinople notion of the relationship between the different persons of the Christian Trinity (*T. Isaac* 8.8).

The three references to the Trinity suggest that *T. Isaac*'s textual community would have been viewed as orthodox.

There are two clear christological references. The first reference occurs in *T. Isaac* 3.14-20 when Isaac prophesies the life of Christ.

³⁸² See page 51 above.

After these another forty-two generations will pass until Christ comes, he will be born to a virgin who is pure called Mary. He will spend thirty years proclaiming in the world. And after all of this is completed, he will choose twelve people, and he will reveal to them his mysteries and he will teach them about the type of his body and his true blood by means of bread and wine. And the bread becomes the body of God and the wine becomes the blood of God. After this he will ascend a wood cross and die on account of the whole creation and he will rise on the third day. He will despoil the underworld. He will take all of humankind from the enemy, all of the generations will be saved by his body and his blood until the completion of the age. (*T. Isaac* 3.14-18a)

The second reference occurs in *T. Isaac* 6.32 when the Lord speaks of his future incarnation, death, and resurrection: “when it happens and I become a man and I die and I rise from the dead on the third day.” Together, these two passages offer a notion of Christ incarnate.

One might ask: What might it mean for *T. Isaac*’s textual community’s Christology to have had Isaac as a model for holy living instead of Christ? I propose that the community had a rather high Christology, such that the *imitatio Christi* was not possible. Christ’s divine nature would have made it difficult for a mere human to be holy in a similar manner. Instead, Isaac became the figure who the monks sought to emulate; thus *imitatio Isaaci* replaced *imitation Christi*. The monks imitated a human exemplar of holiness, a human who showed the possibility of humanity. In doing so, the community kept a distinction between what was possible for a human to do as a human, and what Christ as the divine son of God was able to do.

As I will expand on later in the chapter, the rhetoric of *T. Isaac* encouraged the textual community to identify itself as the children of Isaac. In choosing to identify itself as the children of Isaac, instead of as children of God, one might also suggest that the *T. Isaac*’s textual community was not Arian. A central claim of Arianism was that salvation

is achieved by imitating Christ's moral perfection and, like Christ, being adopted as a son of God.³⁸³ In this view, Christ's sonship is the same as the sonship of any other human adopted by God through moral perfection. Such a view challenges the orthodox belief that Christ's sonship is ontological³⁸⁴ and not the result of Christ's moral perfection during his life on earth. From the orthodox perspective, Christ's sonship is of a different kind than the sonship that a Christian receives. By focusing on their identity as children of the patriarchs, *T. Isaac's* textual community could read *T. Isaac* in a way that allowed them to maintain the separation between Christ and humans in terms of Christ's divinity and holiness. Further, the children of Isaac did not gain this identity just through their own moral perfection, but by the mercy of God (*T. Isaac* 6.7-21) and the act of Christ (*T. Isaac* 6.31). While humans had to participate, God made adoption possible.

4.2 Reading Testament of Isaac as an Ascetical Regimen

As Elizabeth Clark has pointed out, it is much easier to identify ascetic behaviors than it is to define asceticism.³⁸⁵ So what makes an ascetic behavior ascetic? The behavior is marked by intentional, repeated performances. Ascetic behavior is regulated by the memory of tradition.³⁸⁶ In looking back to the tradition, the ascetic recreates the memory so as to be relevant for the present. The ascetic behaviors are an embodied enactment (or in some cases rejection) of the remembered tradition. *T. Isaac* remembers a

³⁸³ Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism*, 43-76.

³⁸⁴ Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 417-58.

³⁸⁵ E.A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 14.

³⁸⁶ Flood, *The Ascetic Self*, 2.

particular portrait of Isaac that falls within the boundaries of tradition. By embodying its ascetic behaviors understood in light of *T. Isaac*, the textual community enacted the remembered tradition, making it relevant for the community's identity as children of Isaac.

The goal of an ascetic behavior is to transform or to transcend the current self to the self that one desires to be. The ascetic seems to have no less than three selves – the former-self, the desired-self, and the self-in-process. Through repetitive ascetic performance, the ascetic looks to cultivate the self-in-process to come closer to the desired-self. The ascetic can monitor his progress by self-knowledge and comparison of the self-in-process to the former-self and the desired-self.

In *T. Isaac*, the textual community was able to find ascetic practices promoted that, through repetitive performance, could assist the textual community to become children of Isaac. The remembered Isaac became a teacher and model for the ascetic life. Among other practices, *T. Isaac* prescribed reading and writing as ascetical practices. The ascetic behaviors and practices located in *T. Isaac* functioned as an ascetical regimen for the textual community that desired to cultivate itself as the children of Isaac.

4.2.1 Ascetic Practices and Behaviors – Isaac as Ascetic Guide in *T. Isaac*

T. Isaac's textual community read the last words of Isaac in order to help it to come closer to the ideal of Isaac. The angel commands Isaac to leave instructions “for the generations that are coming after you and those who love God so that they may live in accordance with them” (*T. Isaac* 2.21). In this portion of the chapter, I will look closer at the details of Isaac's advice and actions for the benefit of his future progeny. What are

the practices that Isaac endorses and performs in his own asceticism? What are the ethical exhortations that Isaac shares with his audience? In a monastic setting where the words of God and God's holy persons were scripts to be performed as part of the monks' daily lives, Isaac's exhortations were not just theoretical ethical advice but everyday performances to be enacted. They became ascetic behaviors to bring about a new self.

Isaac's own ascetic behaviors are on display in *T. Isaac* 4.1-4. Isaac would withdraw from others into the seclusion of his bedroom. Isaac's seclusion allowed him to practice his asceticism. He would fast daily until evening. He also offered sacrifices for his and his family's benefit.³⁸⁷ Half of his night was spent in prayer and praise to God.³⁸⁸ In addition to the daily practices, three times a year he would fast for forty days, avoiding wine and fruit while not sleeping in his bed. Finally, Isaac would continually pray and give thanks to God.

Through Isaac's words to the priest, the textual community received practices of holiness and ethical instructions (*T. Isaac* 4.9-30). Isaac speaks about purity within the worship of the Lord (*T. Isaac* 4.9-20). First, there is an emphasis on keeping the body holy since the temple of God is in it (*T. Isaac* 4.9). Isaac associating the temple and body would likely have been heard by the textual community as an echo of Paul (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16).³⁸⁹ Second, Isaac discusses common moral topics with a concern to

³⁸⁷ This is reminiscent of Job 1:5.

³⁸⁸ This is a common activity for those monks that are practicing sleeplessness.

³⁸⁹ In Caroline Schroeder's monograph on monastic bodies and Shenoute, she notes that Shenoute uses this Pauline metaphor. The physical church building at the White Monastery is treated as a metaphor for the monk's body. Both the church and the monk's body are spaces in which the monk should worship and glorify God. However, there is a concern to maintain ascetic purity and holiness in both the body and the church building in order to continue to experience the presence of God. In discussing the bodily resurrection, Shenoute identifies Abraham and Isaac as prototypes for moral and physical purity. Shenoute

maintain a state of moral purity: he exhorts his audience to avoid anger, evil-speaking, vainglory, uttering thoughtless words, and trying to take what is not one's own (*T. Isaac* 4.10-11). Third, sacrifices are to be without blemish (*T. Isaac* 4.12). Fourth, one is to wash before coming to the altar (*T. Isaac* 4.12). Fifth, control of thoughts is also important at this point, being at peace with others and keeping one's mind off worldly things but on thoughts of God, is important (*T. Isaac* 4.12). Sixth, one should recite one hundred prayers to God and make a confession to God when making sacrifices (*T. Isaac* 4.13). It is interesting that the instructions do not include how to sacrifice the unblemished sacrifice. Rather the concern is to create a state of purity in the performance. The performer, the sacrifice, and the temple of God required a state of purity. In this state of purity, the textual community would have offered the prayer (*T. Isaac* 4.14-19) for sacrifices to God. The sacrifice was to please God, so the priest (and textual community) was to strive upward (*T. Isaac* 4.20).

After discussing purity within the setting of worship to God, Isaac talks about ethical behavior as a pre-requisite for participating in the angelic service to God (*T. Isaac* 4.21-30). The new life is still conceived as service to God; that is why purity is necessary. The life of the priest and monk is an ascetic one. He exhorts the priest to be temperate in regard to food, drink, and sleep (*T. Isaac* 4.21). Isaac displays this temperance in his own life. The priest should not talk about worldly events nor listen to others talk about them. Rather, the priest should occupy his life with prayer, vigils, and recitation (*T. Isaac* 4.21-

uses the Akedah to justify his claims. Abraham loved God more than his son (and is, thus, a model of faith for Christians). Isaac "represents the pure sacrifice made to God – a sacrifice that *all* Christians should offer in the form of their very own bodies." Here, she quotes Shenoute from *The Lord Thundered, Discourses* 4, GG 27: "But as for us, we did not obey him up to now in all his words, namely that we present our bodies to him as a sacrifice in complete purity and love." Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies*, 104-5, quote on 155 (emphasis original).

22). Renunciation of the world and all its evil cares is also important for the priest and monk; in the place of worldliness, they should join in the holy service with the angels in purity to God (*T. Isaac* 4.23-25). Isaac associates the service on earth with the angelic service in the heavens. This association of services will result in the priests and monks being friends with the angels, due to their perfect faith and purity. Again, Isaac's life is a model, since already he is the one who interacts with the angels in his daily life.

Isaac offers the demands required of all, that is sinlessness (*T. Isaac* 4.26). Isaac lists a group of commands against the chief sins worthy of repentance: killing – with the sword and the tongue; fornication – with body or mind; defiling the young by going into them; envy; anger; rejoicing in the failure of your neighbor; slander – speaking it or listening to it; and looking at women with a lustful eye. Isaac tells his audience to beware of these sins and other ones like them so that the audience is secured from the pending punishment in heaven (*T. Isaac* 4.27-30). By identifying the sins worthy of repentance, Isaac provides a map of behaviors that the textual community would have been able to use to monitor their selves. Sinlessness required the monk to police the self and offer repentance when sin occurs.

When Isaac finishes talking, the crowd agrees that what he said was correct and, then, Isaac is taken up by the angel on a tour of hell (*T. Isaac* 5.3-24).³⁹⁰ The tour helps to reinforce the importance of repenting and striving for, and accomplishing, sinlessness.

Isaac vividly describes the wrath that he witnesses on his tour – the wrath that results

³⁹⁰ Collins identifies this as an apocalypse of the other-worldly type. It shows a concern with personal afterlife: the righteous enjoy life in heaven while sinners suffer punishment. Collins, "Early Christian Apocalypses," 79. There are parallels between the heavenly tour motif found here and in legends of the anchorites in Egypt. Frankfurter, "The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity," 177. The tour has been discussed extensively in two separate discussions of hell in early Christian and Jewish writings. See Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*; Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*.

from sin, as he warned the audience in his exhortations (*T. Isaac* 4.27-30). Quarreling with one's neighbor without reconciling with him results in one sinner being torn apart by beasts, regurgitated, becoming like himself again, having another beast tear him apart and so on (*T. Isaac* 5.4-13).³⁹¹ Other sinners are in the fiery river, a fire that burns the sinners but does not touch the righteous (*T. Isaac* 5.14-16).³⁹² There is also the pit of the abyss in which those who committed the sin of Sodom were in great distress (*T. Isaac* 5.17-19). There is a pit full of worms (*T. Isaac* 5.20).³⁹³ Abdermerouchos, the torturing angel, metes out the punishments on the sinners, with the goal of making sinners know that God is (*T. Isaac* 5.21).³⁹⁴ Isaac sees a house of fiery stone under which adult sinners were punished (*T. Isaac* 5.22). The angel commands Isaac to look with his eyes and contemplate the punishments (*T. Isaac* 5.23).

Just as Isaac's commands to those gathered to his deathbed instructed *T. Isaac's* textual community, the tour of hell also functioned didactically. In revealing the severity of the punishment for a variety of sins, the angel asks Isaac to look and contemplate.³⁹⁵

³⁹¹ Bauckham notices the eternal punishment of being thrown to the lions, eaten, reconstituted, and so on, is also found in a medieval Hebrew vision of Joshua ben Levi. James points out its similarity to the later Jewish work *Torath Adam*. James, *The Testament of Abraham*, 159; Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*, 219-20.

Himmelfarb notes "two of the texts containing beasts, the Apocalypse of Peter and the Testament of Isaac, are probably of Egyptian origin. The demons of the Coptic versions of the Testament have animal faces; the human body with animal head is well known in ancient Egypt." Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 119.

³⁹² Cf. Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*, 320.

³⁹³ Cf. Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 118.

³⁹⁴ Himmelfarb notes that the name of the torturing angel varies in different versions of the *Testament*. Himmelfarb suggests that the name in the Sahidic and Bohairic versions goes back to the caretaking angel of the Apocalypse of Peter. Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 120 n.61, 168.

³⁹⁵ Bauckham generalizes about apocalypses including *T. Isaac* 5, "The main concern is to show how a wide range of particular sins is specifically punished by the appropriate forms of judgment in the afterlife." Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*, 35.

The textual community, likewise, was to contemplate the torments. One must purify one's self – remove sin from one's life – as one worked to be like Isaac. Contemplating the torments and sin would help the ascetic to identify and work to remove the sin from her own life.

When we turn to Isaac's final words to Jacob, Isaac offers advice for how a child of Isaac ought to act:

Keep a sharp eye on yourself. Do not dishonor the image of God; for what you do to the image of man, you do to the image of God, and God will do it to you too in the place where you will meet him. (*T. Isaac* 6.32)

Surveillance of the self becomes an ascetic behavior that aims to change the self. By closely monitoring one's self-in-process and making sure one did not dishonor the image of God, one could move toward the subjectivity that Isaac models in *T. Isaac*.

4.2.2 Writing and Reading as Ascetic Behaviors in *T. Isaac*

Michel Foucault explored ancient ethics as part of his later work on the history of sexuality and on governmentality of the self.³⁹⁶ Rather than treating ethics as an idea or set of regulatory norms, Foucault followed the Aristotelian tradition focused on practices that are germane to a certain way of life. It is based on a view of the person as malleable, that through ethics one can improve one's self. Ethics is not primarily a rational principle (as in Kantian ethics) but rather practices, techniques and discourses that are intended to

³⁹⁶ Ancient ethics figure prominently in second and third volumes of his *The History of Sexuality*, but it can also be seen in his late lectures at the College of France, published interviews and other late essays. M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure* (trans. Hurley; New York: Vintage, 1985); M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 3: The Care of the Self* (trans. Hurley; New York: Vintage Books, 1986); M. Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (1; ed. Rabinow; New York: The New Press, 1997).

transform the self and achieve a certain state of existence.³⁹⁷ Important to the Aristotelian tradition of ethics was the notion of *habitus* as a pedagogical process by which an ethical self is developed.

The concept of technologies of the self was important for Foucault's ethical program.³⁹⁸ According to Foucault, technologies of the self:

permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, and conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.³⁹⁹

Rather than ethics being reduced to a list telling someone how to behave, one can explore ethics in terms of the practices that one enacts to become an ethical subject. One becomes an ethical subject through an active and on going process, not by passively following rules.⁴⁰⁰

When we turn to the Egyptian monastic context, two such ethical practices – or, ritualized technologies of the self – intended to cultivate a new ethical subject were reading and writing.⁴⁰¹ They were outward performances that through repetition would assist in the coordination of the inward disposition of the practitioners, allowing for the true self to be revealed externally as the person lived out their identity as a child of Isaac.

³⁹⁷ S. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 28.

³⁹⁸ Foucault identified four aspects of ethics: 1) the “substance of ethics,” 2) “modes of subjectivation,” 3) “techniques of the self,” and 4) “telos.” I only focus on his third aspect of ethics.

³⁹⁹ Foucault. "Technologies of the Self," 225.

⁴⁰⁰ Even in a monastic setting where obedience to another might be required, there is an active self-determination involved that seems absent in the unquestioning adherence to moral and legal codes.

⁴⁰¹ It is becoming more common for scholars to acknowledge the practices of reading and writing for cultivating the self. See the recent article, R. Krawiec, "Monastic Literacy in John Cassian: Toward a New Sublimity," *CH* 81, no. 4 (2012): 765-95. Cf. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 2.

I wish to focus on writing and reading as ascetical performances that seem particularly important to *T. Isaac*.

In the prologue, the conversation between the Lord and Abraham, and the epilogue, *T. Isaac*'s textual community finds support for viewing writing and reading as ascetic practices that it is supposed to perform. Reading and writing Isaac's testament are practices that, through repetition, help to transform the person's self into the image of Isaac, the righteous, the beloved of the Lord.

Now Isaac the patriarch wrote his testament and addressed his words of wisdom to his son Jacob and to all those who gathered around him. The blessings of the patriarch will be on those who come after us, *even those who listen to these words, to these words of instruction and these medicines of life, so that the grace of God may be with all those who believe*. This is the end of obedience, as it is written, '*You have heard a word let it abide in you*' – which means that a man should strive patiently with what he hears. God gives grace to those who believe: he who believes the words of God and of his holy ones will be an inheritor of the kingdom of God. (*T. Isaac* 1.2-6)

As I will show below, the theme of who is a child of the patriarchs, or their inheritor, in the kingdom of God is important in *T. Isaac*. In the prologue of *T. Isaac*, the listener of the word will become the inheritor. Unlike modern reading practices, in Egyptian monasticism, and the ancient Roman world generally, reading was often an oral / aural activity.⁴⁰² I read *T. Isaac* 1.2-6 to be saying that the hearer of the words is part of the reading process, for someone would be speaking the words within the reading group

⁴⁰² Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*; D. Burton-Christie. "Oral Culture, Biblical Interpretation, and Spirituality in Early Christian Monasticism," in *The Bible in Greek Antiquity* (ed. Blowers; vol. 1 of *The Bible through the Ages*; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 415-440. Even the production of texts would have an oral aspect to it. According to Gamble, "in the composition of a text the oral was converted to the written. In antiquity a text could be composed either by dictating to a scribe or by writing in one's own hand. Yet when an author did write out his own text the words were spoken as they were being written, just as scribes in copying manuscripts practiced what is called self-dictation." Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 204.

for the sound of the words to be heard.⁴⁰³ However, it is not as simple as to just hear the words in passing: the words are to be internalized. The reader is told to let the word abide in her.⁴⁰⁴ She is to strive patiently with it. This is not a passive process that makes one become the inheritor. The inheritor is the one who actively works through the text.

The passage calls the words of instruction – that is, Isaac’s testament – “medicines of life.” This phrase harkens to the importance of the words to affect the reader. Listening to these words is a way to care for the self, a predominant theme in ancient philosophy.⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, monks were concerned with caring for their souls.

Paphnutius reports:

Now as for the old man, of whom we have already spoken, that is, Abba Zacchaeus, it was he who taught us how to live in the [desert] and it was he who clothed us in [the] monastic habit. The old man spoke to us about the virtues [of] the holy ones in the desert who zealously sought to see no one. He gave [us the rules] for a strict ascetic practice [...] and would command us, [saying], ‘Take care of your souls!’ [...] / He was advanced in a very strict way of life, and fled all intercourse with women and all conversation. (*Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt* §17)

Paphnutius’ account links together the care of the soul with Abba Zacchaeus’ ascetical training of other monks. Ascetical practice was intended to care for the soul. Abba Zacchaeus taught the new monks the practices necessary to take care of the soul. In a context that connected care of the soul and ascetic training, the textual community of *T. Isaac* would likely have recognized the “medicines of life” in *T. Isaac* to mean it provided them with instructions for ascetical training.

⁴⁰³ Also, unlike modern reading practices, reading in antiquity tended to be a social activity, done in groups. Often in monastic communities, reading occurred in group settings in worship, but also in study groups within the different houses of a monastery.

⁴⁰⁴ Kuhn suggests this is a quotation of Sir. 19.10. Kuhn. "The Testament of Isaac," 427 n.1.

⁴⁰⁵ Foucault, *The Care of the Self*; Foucault. "Technologies of the Self," 223-52.

The epilogue is also concerned with the inheritors of the kingdom and practice (*T. Isaac* 8.5-8). In it, however, there is no explicit mention of Isaac's words, reading, or writing. The emphasis is on performing acts of mercy in the name of Abraham and Isaac on the day of their commemoration. Those that do so will become the children of the patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven. Yet, in *T. Isaac* 6, reading and writing are lumped in with other practices one should do in order to be given as children to the patriarchs. The first act is copying Isaac's testament, "The Lord said to Abraham, 'As for all those who are given the name of my beloved Isaac, let each one of them copy his testament and honor it'" (*T. Isaac* 6.7). After additional acts are suggested, the Lord endorses reading Isaac's testament or listening to another person read his testament: "let him seek out a copy of his testament and read it on my beloved Isaac's day. If he cannot read it, let him go and listen to others who can" (*T. Isaac* 6.15). Finally, the Lord concludes,

And I will give you everyone who concerns himself about Isaac's life and his testament, or does any compassionate act, such as giving a cup of water to drink, or who copies out his testament with one's own hand, and those who read it with all their heart in faith, believing everything that I have said. (*T. Isaac* 6.19-20)

Thus, among the various sacrifices and acts of mercy by which one is given to the patriarchs as a child, the Lord gives a prominent place to reading and writing Isaac's testament.

In the world of early Christian monasticism, reading and writing played an important role in fashioning a religious self. Claudia Rapp argues that "in the monastic world, the act of copying the Bible was considered to be at the same time production and

consumption.”⁴⁰⁶ Monks, as they produced a text, consumed the text “in the sense that the monk is at the same time executing the manuscript and making use of it.”⁴⁰⁷ As copyist, the monk spoke aloud the text while copying it, a performance similar to the recital of scriptures.⁴⁰⁸ One recited scripture in order to memorize it, and one memorized scripture for the purpose of enacting it. The highest value of scripture in monastic life was to live it. Thus, the performances of copying, reading, memorizing, and internalizing scripture was all intertwined in the process of living scripture.⁴⁰⁹ The copying of scripture was regarded as a pious activity, as Rapp notes, “Christian writers often mention the copying of scripture and other edifying texts to illustrate the piety of certain individuals.”⁴¹⁰ The pious scribe’s copying of scripture became a substitute for a life filled with exemplary conduct.⁴¹¹ Additionally, the practice of copying, Rapp speculates, may even have been part of initial training for new monks.⁴¹² In monastic context, copying texts assisted in the

⁴⁰⁶ Rapp. "Christians and Their Manuscripts in the Greek East in the Fourth Century," 130. See also Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature*, 105-28.

⁴⁰⁷ Rapp. "Christians and Their Manuscripts in the Greek East in the Fourth Century," 143.

⁴⁰⁸ Rapp. "Christians and Their Manuscripts in the Greek East in the Fourth Century," 141.

⁴⁰⁹ Rapp. "Christians and Their Manuscripts in the Greek East in the Fourth Century," 137-40.

⁴¹⁰ Rapp. "Holy Texts, Holy Men, and Holy Scribes," 208.

⁴¹¹ Rapp. "Holy Texts, Holy Men, and Holy Scribes," 212.

⁴¹² Rapp. "Christians and Their Manuscripts in the Greek East in the Fourth Century," 144. Indeed, this is speculative. While the coenobitic style monks would have had some form of training in which Scriptures were read, memorized, and discussed the copying of texts does not appear as part of the training for the entire community. Under the Pachomian *Precepts*, all incoming monks receives twenty psalms, two letters of Paul, and a part of scripture and any illiterate monks would be trained in reading (§139), so that they could memorize at least the New Testament and Psalter (§140). This training does not necessitate that writing was involved, but it is a possibility.

To speculate further, those with the skills to copy, or perhaps showed the potential for it, may have had a specialized component to their training – since they would have been the labor pool for monastic scriptoria – but this by no means indicates it was part of their initial monastic training.

memorization of the word of God. Furthermore, Rapp suggests that the novice monk would have copied their own codices, following the practice of other occupations in which one acquired the books of one's trade through the act of copying.⁴¹³ In sum, then, Rapp's argument lays the groundwork for understanding that copying a text can perform in the same way as a recital of a text. Both aid the self in memorizing and internalizing the text. Once internalized, one is able to enact fully the text in one's life. Writing and copying texts are associated with one's piety. Holy persons are ascribed piety through the copying of scripture and piety. Yet, Rapp's work should not limit us to thinking that only the copying of scripture was an act of piety.

In Derek Krueger's study on holy writing, he argues that the performance of writing for hagiographers is also ascetic in that authors "also sought to imitate the saints, remaking themselves through their own observance of ascetic conventions in the production of the texts."⁴¹⁴ In its monastic context, the copyists of *T. Isaac* may have sought to remake themselves through their ascetic observances in the reproduction of the text. In monastic life, hagiography was viewed as an ascetic intellectual activity, an act of piety.⁴¹⁵ Through hagiography, the writer produced a likeness of the saints in narration and in the self.⁴¹⁶ According to Krueger, "Writing, like fasting or prayer, became a technology for attaining the goal of their own ascetic profession: a reconstituted ascetic self, displaying the virtues exemplified by the saints about whom they narrated."⁴¹⁷

⁴¹³ Rapp. "Holy Texts, Holy Men, and Holy Scribes," 205-6.

⁴¹⁴ Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 94.

⁴¹⁵ Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 96.

⁴¹⁶ Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 97.

Likewise, *T. Isaac* lists the writing of Isaac's testament as an act of piety. As demonstrated in previous chapters of this dissertation, the writer of *T. Isaac* produced a likeness of Isaac in the narration, one that is familiar to the Isaacic tradition circulating in antiquity. Additionally, the copyists and those who wrote Isaac's testament would have been performing an ascetic practice intended to bring about the likeness of Isaac within their selves. By copying *T. Isaac* the textual community performed an ascetic practice with the aim of becoming like Isaac.

In Foucault's studies of the ancient care of the self, he noted that, in the first and second century C.E., one technique used to construct the self was constant writing activity:

Writing was also important in the culture of the care of the self. One of the tasks that defines the care of the self is that of taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatises and letters to friends to help them, and keeping notebooks in order to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed.⁴¹⁸

One example is the notebook that served as a memory aid. As Foucault described the *hupomnemata*, they constitute "a material and a framework for exercises to be carried out frequently: reading, rereading, meditating, and conversing with oneself and with others."⁴¹⁹ They are an example of an exercise undertaken as a training of oneself.⁴²⁰

David Brakke suggests that a similar type of writing activity was going on in Evagrius

⁴¹⁷ Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 108.

⁴¹⁸ Foucault. "Technologies of the Self," 232.

⁴¹⁹ M. Foucault. "Self Writing," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (ed. Rabinow; vol. 1 of *Essential Writings of Foucault 1954-1984*; New York: The New Press, 1997), 210.

⁴²⁰ M. Foucault. "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (ed. Rabinow; vol. 1 of *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*; New York: The New Press, 1997), 273.

Ponticus' *Talking Back*. While they are different in that Evagrius was writing the work for another monk, both kinds of books were written with an intention to help the reader to cultivate his self.⁴²¹ While *T. Isaac* is not an example of *hupomnemata*, writing seems to have a similar function. By writing out Isaac's words, a copy was available for reading, meditating, and conversing. Since *T. Isaac* was supposed to have captured the last words of Isaac, it became material for future exercises to help shape the self as a child of Isaac. Writing was a way that one shapes the self. It was not merely an externally oriented act of piety that would cultivate divine favor, nor merely an economic activity that resulted in the production of a text. Writing and copying texts was an act of piety that also affected the writer and copyist. Through the performance of writing and copying Isaac's testament, *T. Isaac*'s textual community shaped the self into one that resembled Isaac.

In Foucault's discussion of writing in early Christianity, he focused on the confession as a key aspect of writing, where writing is "a test and something like a touchstone: in bringing to light the movement of thought, it dissipates the inner shadow where the enemy's plots were woven."⁴²² Yet, here, Foucault was focused on autobiographical writing in early Christianity, and not on writing what one has read, or heard, or been taught. Foucault seems to have been more concerned in uncovering a new technology of the self that distinguished early Christian writing practices from Greco-Roman writing practices for taking care of the self. While it is evident that early Christian

⁴²¹ See Brakke's introductory comments in Evagrius, *Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons* (CSS 229; trans. Brakke; Collegeville, Minn.: Cistercian Publications, 2009), 3-14, esp. 9-11.

⁴²² Foucault. "On the Genealogy of Ethics," 275.

theologians and monks encouraged the practice of writing one's confessions,⁴²³ non-autobiographical writing as technology of the self was also present. This point seems evident from the hagiographical texts that Krueger discusses. Writing hagiography became a way for the author to become more like the saints and gospel writers. It helped the authors to cultivate the virtues of the saints in their own self.⁴²⁴ In addition, Rapp shows the importance of writing and copying non-confessional works in the monastic setting as well for developing oneself.⁴²⁵ *T. Isaac* would be such a non-confessional text that a monk would have copied.

In his revised dissertation, Richard Valantasis argues that texts performed the role of spiritual guide in the ascetical writings of late antiquity. When the physical spiritual guide was absent, the texts became the medium through which one knew the spiritual guide.⁴²⁶ Drawing on the example of Porphyry and Plotinus, Valantasis concludes that “the books and publishing program of the *Enneads* become the only means of spiritual formation. In the reading of the books, the seeker will find the wisdom and guidance of

⁴²³ For example, in Athanasius' *Life of Antony*, Antony encourages other monks to “write down our actions and the impulses of our souls as though we are going to relate them to another” (*Vita Antonii* §55). This serves as a practice to ward off the committing of a sin. Additionally, Shenoute encourages written reports from the women of the White Monastery confessing their sins. For Shenoute, this allows Shenoute to properly purify the communal body from the sin within it. Krawiec, *Shenoute & the Women of the White Monastery*, 86-87, 158. Cf. Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies*. See also Krueger's brief mention of Gregory of Nazianzus's poetic writing. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 1.

⁴²⁴ Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*.

⁴²⁵ Rapp, "Christians and Their Manuscripts in the Greek East in the Fourth Century," 127-48.

⁴²⁶ R. Valantasis, *Spiritual Guides of the Third Century: A Semiotic Study of the Guide-Disciple Relationship in Christianity, Neoplatonism, Hermetism, and Gnosticism* (HDR 27; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

the master.”⁴²⁷ The narrative was a textualized performance that functioned to construct the new self. Valantasis suggests:

Textualized performances discuss the rigor, strictness, and steadfastness of the ascetic’s life in order to idealize and dramatize the ascetic’s efforts. Textualized performance constructs an imitable subject, an imitable performance. These textualized performances do not actually exist, but are created of the stuff of narrative and metaphor, precisely in order to set up the illusion of a reality to be imitated. It sets the character, dramatizes the methods and regimes, in substantiates the fantasy, it performs the ascetical discipline in the mind.⁴²⁸

In the reality of a physical, temporal absence of the righteous figures from the Bible, from the patriarchs to the prophets, from the apostles to Christ, and even more recent saints and martyrs of Christianity, texts about these figures allowed one to have access to the lives and words of these characters. Through the reading and copying of these texts – and not just scripture – the readers and copyists were able to fashion their religious selves in accord with earlier righteous figures. Or, as Krueger puts it, “Texts played a crucial role in the promulgation of ascetic beliefs and practices. Oral traditions and written texts often served as road maps toward this new identity.”⁴²⁹ The texts, then, replaced direct interaction with and training from holy men and holy women.⁴³⁰

The call to abide in Isaac’s words found in the prologue to *T. Isaac* (*T. Isaac* 1.4) invited the textual community to read the text as a technology of the self. While the prescription to read was connected to the yearly commemoration, abiding in Isaac’s

⁴²⁷ Valantasis, *Spiritual Guides of the Third Century*, 60.

⁴²⁸ Valantasis, *The Making of the Self*, 40.

⁴²⁹ Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 95.

⁴³⁰ While there were elder monks who would lead their house in study of texts, the texts remain the teacher and model which all of the monks were to imitate.

words suggest reading and rereading and meditating on *T. Isaac*. *T. Isaac* uses the Greek loan word *μελετᾶν* that is often glossed as to meditate (on a reading) by reciting it over and over again. It tends to be used in monastic literature for reading from memory such as a monk would have done while doing manual labor, or traveling. The reading of *T. Isaac* as part of a yearly commemoration suggests that reading could be an act of devotion in the liturgical setting, in a communal setting.⁴³¹ Yet, the use of *μελετᾶν* suggests something more than a public, liturgical reading the text: the prescription to read of *T. Isaac* could be thought of as an ascetic kind of reading of *T. Isaac*. It could be done either in solitary study, or with other members of the textual community. The ritualized performance of reading Isaac's testament would have affected the reader's self. Ascetic reading of the text would help *T. Isaac*'s textual community to constitute the self as an ethical subject; through this repeated performance, one would come to acquire the virtues and righteousness of Isaac. The ritualized reading of *T. Isaac* that resulted in the Lord giving the reader as a child to the patriarch Isaac also resulted in the reader's self becoming like Isaac.

More than memorizing the words of God, the desert fathers' interpretation of scripture involved practice that led to transformation. The degree to which a monk was transformed by scripture was an indication of the person's holiness.⁴³² In withdrawing from society, monks engaged with scripture to train themselves. As Burton-Christie says,

⁴³¹ In Coptic, it is more common for public reading from a physical book, such as when the lector read in church was denoted by the verb *ⲱⲛ*.

⁴³² Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 23.

“Scripture was central to the new paideia of the desert.”⁴³³ At the same time, the words of elders “were cherished, collected, and transmitted because of the power and meaning they had in the ongoing life of the early desert community.”⁴³⁴ While the *Apophthegmata Patrum* collections were likely intended originally for those outside of Egypt,⁴³⁵ the importance of the words of elder monks were sought out, as their words were thought to be divinely inspired.⁴³⁶ Scripture and the words of the elders helped the monks in their quest for salvation and self-knowledge.⁴³⁷ According to Burton-Christie, reciting scripture assisted the monk to “become absorbed in the world of the texts.”⁴³⁸ By reciting texts, monks gained access to the inherent power in scripture, aiding them in their quest for salvation.⁴³⁹ Monks viewed biblical heroes as exemplars that addressed values and virtues that the monks sought to embody.⁴⁴⁰ Biblical exemplars provided an example of virtues that, if practiced, would move one closer to holiness.⁴⁴¹ But biblical exemplars also offered precedence for ascetical practices for the monks to enact to move closer to

⁴³³ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 59.

⁴³⁴ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 78.

⁴³⁵ The *Apophthegmata Patrum* was produced in Palestine, probably in the 5th century. The pilgrimage traffic would allow for the collections to diffuse throughout the late ancient Christian world. W. Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 170-71.

⁴³⁶ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 77-8.

⁴³⁷ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 111.

⁴³⁸ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 118.

⁴³⁹ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 122.

⁴⁴⁰ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 167.

⁴⁴¹ Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 171.

holiness.⁴⁴² *T. Isaac*'s textual community would have engaged *T. Isaac* in a similar manner when reading it as an ascetic regimen.⁴⁴³

One might question how popular the program of writing Isaac's testament actually was. A brief look at the manuscript evidence shows that very few copies of *T. Isaac* survive in any version and only one survives in the Sahidic. I would respond by suggesting that the lack of surviving materials does not necessarily preclude ascetical writing of the text. One must take into account various factors that result in the loss of copies of texts between late antiquity and modern times – for example, the destruction of monastic libraries during religious and political turmoil; the ordinary wear and tear of manuscripts plus the quality of the materials for the manuscript and the climate of where the manuscripts were; and various other accidents of history. Furthermore, the cost of resources for writing copies of *T. Isaac* may have been prohibitive, leading to communal reading and study of the text from a single copy of the work, but perhaps the monks copied parts for their personal notebooks as well. The reproduction of *T. Isaac* in this case would only have been done to replace the existing community copy, or to share it with another monastic community, or a requested copy from lay persons. The reading of *T. Isaac* was sufficient to allow for one to learn Isaac's testament. We need not assume that the number of surviving copies of *T. Isaac* reflects the popularity of the ascetical program.

⁴⁴² Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 197-98.

⁴⁴³ As I have suggested throughout this chapter, the monks found works that may not have been considered 'scripture' to be authoritative and appropriate for using as part of their ascetic programs. *T. Isaac* need not to have been 'scripture' for the textual community to find it authoritative and appropriate for use as an ascetic regimen.

4.3 The Textual Community as Children of Isaac

The *T. Isaac* contains rhetoric that encouraged *T. Isaac*'s textual community to identify itself as the children of Isaac. One of the notable features of the Sahidic *T. Isaac* is the recurrence of the narrator identifying Isaac as 'our father Isaac' (πενειωτ ισαακ).⁴⁴⁴ By my count, the narrator calls Isaac 'our father Isaac' sixteen times (*T. Isaac* 2.14, 18; 3.1, 5, 7, 21; 4.1, 9; 6.24, 26 [twice], 29, 30; 8.1, 3 [twice]). After the phrase occurs the first time at *T. Isaac* 2.14, the narrator only calls Isaac just 'Isaac' four times. The sheer number of times that the narrator uses the phrase suggests that this is an important idea for *T. Isaac*.

The prevalence of the phrase 'our father' is all the more striking since it is not a genre-specific feature. Other testaments that look at biblical heroes do not employ the label in similar fashion.⁴⁴⁵ One could suggest that the differences in narration style between *T. Isaac* and other testaments, especially those that depend on the dying patriarch's speech as the primary means to move along the narrative, is the main reason for the lack of repetition of the phrase elsewhere. However, other works with an external narrator do not emphasize the phrase through repetition. It is absent in *T. Ab.*⁴⁴⁶ In *T. Jac.*,

⁴⁴⁴ Eckhard von Nordheim mentions the phrase occurs frequently but he does not engage the significance for the phrases repetition for *T. Isaac* since he is primarily concerned about testaments in general, not *T. Isaac* in particular. Nordheim, *Die Lehre der Alten*, 152.

⁴⁴⁵ None of the works that *OTP* classifies as a testament contains more than seven occurrences of 'our father' and that instance comes from the *Testament of Jacob*. Using *OTP* to count the other testaments occurrences of the phrase "our father(s)" shows that it is no where as prevalent as in *T. Isaac*: T12P (*T. Reuben* [2 "our father"], *T. Simeon* [1], *T. Levi* [3], *T. Judah* [0], *T. Issachar* [2], *T. Zebulon* [4], *T. Dan* [1], *T. Naphtali* [3], *T. Gad* [2], *T. Asher* [0], *T. Joseph* [0], *T. Benjamin* [1]), T3P (*T. Abr.* [0], *T. Isaac* [22], *T. Jacob* [7]), *T. Job* [1], and *T. Moses* [2]). TLG reveals similar results in a lemma search of πατηρ and ἡμας for the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *Testament of Job*, *Testament of Abraham*, and the *Testament of Solomon*. Note: my count of *T. Isaac* is based on Sahidic version, not *OTP*.

⁴⁴⁶ Heide mentions one manuscript of *T. Ab.*, Ms arabe 132, suffers numerous substitutions, misreadings, and orthodox corruptions. Interestingly, most references to "Abraham" in the manuscript were written "our

the narrator occasionally uses the phrase, but not at the same frequency found in *T. Isaac*. The presence of ‘our father’ in *T. Isaac* is not due to differences in narrative style. Rather, it reflects a purpose of *T. Isaac*. The use of the phrase ‘our father’ encouraged the textual community to identify with Isaac as its father.

If this is the case, why wait to introduce the phrase until *T. Isaac* 2.14? That is, what changes at *T. Isaac* 2.14? At this point in the narrative, the angel has told Isaac he is to draw up his testament for he is about to die (rest for all eternity). The angel, in finishing his message, pronounces, “Blessed is your father who begot you. Blessed are you also. Blessed is your son Jacob. And blessed are your descendants that will come after you” (ⲛⲁⲓⲁⲧⲉ̅ ⲛⲓⲡⲉⲧⲉⲛⲥⲡⲉⲣⲛⲁ ⲉⲧⲛⲏⲩ ⲙⲏ̅ⲛⲥⲁⲧⲏⲩⲧⲏ̅) (*T. Isaac* 2.12). While Isaac has already been called ‘patriarch’ and ‘father of the world’ (ⲡⲁⲧⲣⲓⲁⲣⲏⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲙⲏ̅ⲡⲓⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ) (*T. Isaac* 2.8) and mention has been made to Isaac’s ‘lot’ (ⲕⲗⲏⲣⲟⲥ) (*T. Isaac* 2.7), this is the first mention of Isaac’s descendants that will come after him. It also works to disconnect the blessing from only Jacob’s line. Jacob is blessed, but so are Isaac’s future descendants – who are not specified as Jacob’s descendants. The rhetoric of the passage encouraged the textual community to identify with Isaac’s future offspring. Two verses later the narrator continues the report of Isaac and the angel’s conversation with the phrase ‘our father Isaac’. The angel continues, instructing Isaac to give the instructions to Isaac’s children (ⲛⲉⲕⲟⲩⲏⲣⲉ) (*T. Isaac* 2.21). It is interesting that children is in the plural, yet nowhere in the narrative does Isaac’s other son Esau arrive to his father’s deathbed. Rather, it is Isaac’s descendants that will come after him that are

father Abraham.” Heide. "The Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic Versions of the *Testament of Abraham*," 63. I suggest that such substitutions may reflect the impulse of textual communities to identify with the patriarchs.

present. By reading *T. Isaac*, the textual community was present and received Isaac's instructions, as his descendants.

How does one become Isaac's child? In *T. Isaac* 6, Isaac's tour of the heavens clarifies how one becomes Isaac's future progeny. Abraham appeals to the Lord's mercy to make it possible for many to have the opportunity to become children of the patriarchs. This all happens before the eyes of Isaac, who through his previous characterization had become a trusted and authoritative witness for the textual community. In revealing this account to the textual community, Isaac conveys that, through God's mercy, it was able to become Isaac's children.⁴⁴⁷ Children of Isaac is an identity based not on biological ancestry; rather, it is based upon one's actions and the mercy of the Lord.

The Lord and Abraham spend much of *T. Isaac* 6 discussing whom the Lord will give to the patriarchs as children in the kingdom.⁴⁴⁸ Seven times, the Lord declares an act of piety that one is to do in memory of Isaac. Six of these times, the Lord makes any person who performs the act a child of the patriarchs. The seventh time, the Lord makes

⁴⁴⁷ Bauckham notes that unlike some other works, *T. Isaac* does not refer to human intercession for God's punishment. It is up to God's mercy. Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*, 142 n.29.

⁴⁴⁸ Since M.R. James at the end of the nineteenth century, some scholars have noted that this conversation is reminiscent of Genesis 18. The implications of this relationship, however, are beyond the scope of the dissertation. James, *The Testament of Abraham*. For a comparison of the accounts in the history of interpretation of Gen. 18, see K.D. Lavery, "Abraham's Dialogue with God Over the Destruction of Sodom: Chapters in the History of Interpretation of Genesis 18" (Harvard University, 2007).

The call to remember Isaac is similar to that found in *Life of Onnophrius* §20 prior to Onnophrius' death when he talked to Paphnutius. While it is not framed as whoever remembers Onnophrius will be his child, the reward is similar to the epilogue in the *Testament of Isaac*. In the *Life of Onnophrius* §20: "Lord Jesus will bring him to the thousand years and he will receive an inheritance with the saints." In *T. Isaac* 8.7: "And they shall come to the first hour of the thousand years, in accordance with the promise of our Lord, even our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." The other parallels will be found in the footnotes when *Testament of Isaac* 6 is discussed below.

The *Life of Onnophrius* was likely written by a certain Paphnutius in the fourth or fifth century. See Vivian's introductory comments in Paphnutius, *Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt and The Life of Onnophrius* (CSS 140; trans. Vivian; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1993), 42-50. Interestingly, a copy of the *Life* was found in the same manuscript cache as the Sahidic *Testament of Isaac*. Hyvernat, *A Checklist of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library*.

any person who performs the act an inheritor – that also implies a parent-child relationship. With divine sanction, one may rightfully claim to identify with ‘our father Isaac’.

The first act that a person might perform to become a child of Isaac is to copy Isaac’s testament. The Lord says, “Everyone who is given the name of my beloved Isaac, let them copy his testament and hold it in esteem and feed the hungry” (*T. Isaac* 6.7).⁴⁴⁹ By doing this act, one calls attention to the memory of Isaac in a way that copying one’s own testament could not. The copying of texts usually occurred in scriptoria, some of which would be located in connection with monastic communities in Egypt. This act is distinguished from the ordinary copying of other texts by its ritualized performance that has a focus on the memory of the patriarch Isaac.

Because of the cost for training and materials required to copy a text, many people would be prohibited from having the opportunity to become children of the patriarchs. As such, Abraham appeals to the Lord’s mercy for those without the means and ability. The Lord replies with a second possible act, “Let him feed a hungry person bread” in the name of Isaac on the day of Isaac’s holy remembrance (*T. Isaac* 6.10).⁴⁵⁰ In

⁴⁴⁹ A parsing of the Sahidic is useful at this point to help clarify some potential confusion. What I have glossed as “Let them copy his testament,” in Sahidic is μαροϥζαl ν̄τεϥΔlδ̄θηκη. The verb is an injunctive third person plural as indicated by the verbal prefix with personal pronoun μαροϥ attached to the verb ζαl “to write” but also “to copy” is within the range of meaning. This is pretty straight forward: let them copy. The problem arises with how to take the prefix ν̄τεϥ attached to Δlδ̄θηκη. The third person singular possessive suggests the object of the verb is “his testament.” The confusion sets in when one takes the command to be each person should copy his own testament. The command to copy ‘his testament’ is not, however, a reference to any man writing his own testament. (Contra Allison and Kolenkow, who suggest that the verse results in Abraham acting as an intercessor for those like him who do not write down their own testaments. Kolenkow, “What is the Role of Testament in the Testament of Abraham?,” 183; Allison, *Testament of Abraham*.) If one was asked to write his own testament and hold it in esteem, this act would be unique in that all of the other acts ask for one to do something in memory of Isaac. Rather, one is to write or copy Isaac’s testament and hold it in esteem, as the context of the narrative indicates.

⁴⁵⁰ In the *Life of Onnophrius* §20: “Let him feed a poor brother in my name.”

this act of piety, the Lord mercifully offers another ritualized action of a common early Christian virtue, namely charity. The act is to be done in Isaac's name, on Isaac's day. This ritualized performance of the charitable act helps to shape the person's identity as a child of Isaac.

The Lord prescribes a third act when Abraham intercedes again since he is concerned that the person might be poor and unable to afford the bread. In response, the Lord decrees, "Let him go without sleep on the night of Isaac." Those who fulfill this command will be given as inheritors (*T. Isaac* 6.12). The restriction on sleep was a common ascetic practice in early monasticism.⁴⁵¹ In this instance, the performance of the act on the night of Isaac ritualizes the practice toward the memory of Isaac.

Since the previous practice would require more discipline and strength than some people would have to perform the act, Abraham once more asks the Lord to accommodate those unable to do what the Lord has already offered. The Lord responds to Abraham's request with a fourth act, "Let him offer up a little incense in the name of your beloved Isaac" (*T. Isaac* 6.14).⁴⁵² Incense offerings were not uncommon; yet remembering Isaac focuses the practice, imputing it with new meaning and affect as one becomes a child of the patriarchs.

⁴⁵¹ While Athanasius criticizes this practice among heretical ascetics in *On Sickness and Health*, Frag. A, 5-6, numerous references in monastic sources show sleeplessness to be a common practice without distinction of theological stance. Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism*, 87-90, translation of the text is found on 311-12. See, the Pachomian *Precepts* §87 (where sleeping is restricted to a reclining seat); the Bohairic *Life of Pachomius* §21 (and the parallel in the first Greek *Life of Pachomius* §22); Paphnutius, *Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt* §130; Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos* §94; the *Lives of the Desert Fathers* VIII.50, XI.6, XIII.4, and XX.17; and in the alphabetical *Apophthegmata Patrum*, "Isidore the Priest" §5

⁴⁵² In the *Life of Onnophrius* §20: "Let him offer a little incense in my name"

The Lord does not wait for Abraham's expected intercession for those unable to offer incense. The Lord rattles off the fifth, sixth, and seventh acts in quick succession, "Let him seek after his testament and mediate upon it on the day of Isaac" (*T. Isaac* 6.15). If one cannot read, "Let him go and listen to it from someone who is able (to read the testament)" (*T. Isaac* 6.15). And if this is not possible, "Let him go into his house and say one hundred prayers" (*T. Isaac* 6.16).⁴⁵³ In this rapid list of possible practices, the Lord gives primacy to reading and meditating on Isaac's testament on Isaac's day. This can be done on one's own or, if one is unable to read, with others. The hundred prayers seem to be the minimum, to be done if Isaac's testament is not available for reading or listening.

In these seven practices, the Lord makes it possible for almost anyone – literate or illiterate, rich or poor, physically able or physically limited, in community or in isolation – to have the opportunity to become a child of the patriarchs. In concluding the discussion, the Lord recognizes that "The necessary thing is to offer a sacrifice in the name of my beloved Isaac" (*T. Isaac* 6.17).⁴⁵⁴ Each practice is framed as an offering in the name of Isaac. The key to the ritualization of each of the acts is to perform it in the name of Isaac, or on Isaac's day. One can copy a testament, or another valued text, but it is the copying of Isaac's that distinguishes the act as one that merits God giving the person to Abraham and Isaac as a child. One can feed the poor, but feeding the poor in the name of Isaac on his holy day of remembrance is what merits childship. Such ritualized acts affect the person who performs them, as she transforms her self into a child of Isaac.

⁴⁵³ In the *Life of Onnophrius* §20: "Let him stand and say his prayers three times to God in my name"

⁴⁵⁴ In the *Life of Onnophrius* §20: "Whoever makes an offering in my name and in my memory..."

While *T. Isaac* 6 reads as if it is possible for anyone to become a child of the patriarchs, it retains the possibility that not everyone will become a child of the patriarchs. The opportunity may be open to all, only a select few are actually willing and able to become children of the patriarchs. The echo of Abraham's conversation with God in Genesis 18 and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the Plain in Genesis 19 would have reminded *T. Isaac*'s textual community that God is merciful to the righteous, and delivers them from punishment. At the same time, the echo would remind *T. Isaac*'s textual community that few are righteous. One is left with the impression that the Lord's promise in *T. Isaac* is precarious due to human sinfulness, and the threat of its loss looms throughout one's life. There was the real possibility that one would face the torments of hell if they did not conform to the religious program sketched in Isaac's exhortations and instructions to those who gather to him. To ensure one was among the righteous, one needed to transform one's self in the image of Isaac.

The ascetic performance of reading and writing discussed above, among other prescribed practices, would have helped the monastic members of *T. Isaac*'s textual community to realize their identity as the children of Isaac. By incorporating *T. Isaac* and Isaac into its ascetical project, the textual community became children of Isaac. It came closer to the realization of the new subjectivity that Isaac models in *T. Isaac*.

4.4 The New Subjectivity for the Children of Isaac

Through the performance of reading and writing, the reader or writer/copyist of *T. Isaac* would move her subjectivity from the old subjectivity to the new subjectivity as a

child of Isaac. In the ritualized technologies of the self, as one read or wrote Isaac's testament, one evaluated one's self in relation to one's self as well as in relationship to Isaac. By coming closer to Isaac, one came nearer to one's true self, a child of Isaac. By reading the current self, one was able to assess where she was in relation to the ideal, new self.

T. Isaac's textual community incorporated Isaac and *T. Isaac* as part of the individual's inter-subjectivity.⁴⁵⁵ As children of Isaac, the textual community strived to become holy ones modeled on Isaac. As children of Isaac, new social relationships were established for the textual community. As they realize their new self, members of the community had new relationships with the angels, moved closer to God, and found in select biblical heroes a lineage of righteous, holy persons. As Valantasis points out, there seems to be three subjectivities for the ascetic in the process of self-formation: the old subjectivity (not discussed in great detail but it seems to be related to concern for life in the world that leads to a life of sin that the audience is to avoid), the new subjectivity (modeled on Isaac), and the in-between subjectivity one inhabits as they strive for the new subjectivity (when they are children of Isaac but have not yet fully realized the model of Isaac).⁴⁵⁶ Through the repeated performance of the ritualized acts that the Lord and Isaac prescribe, through the repeated performance of enacting Isaac's words, and

⁴⁵⁵ R. Valantasis identifies inter-subjectivity in regards to asceticism, as being related to the individual social self, the collective people and events that "become constitutive of the individual's particular way of living." For example, a child's social self is formed through the appropriation of examples of parents, teachers, and peers. The social self is shaped by experiences – good and bad – that help to form the subject. In connection with the ascetic subjectivity, Valantasis offers as an example of the incorporation of St. Antony in order to appropriate a way that Antony lived as an ascetic ideal, a goal of a new subjectivity. Valantasis, *The Making of the Self*, 104-105.

⁴⁵⁶ Valantasis, *The Making of the Self*, 104-105.

through the repeated performance in imitation of Isaac's actions and virtues, one cultivated the new self.

The three dimensions of Isaac's character form three elements of the *imitatio Isaaci* model created by *T. Isaac*. As I discussed in earlier chapters, those dimensions are 1) Isaac as priestly authority, 2) Isaac as sacrifice, and 3) Isaac as blind ascetic. In the first dimension, Isaac modeled the need for purity in worship and life. Purity and holiness required the children of Isaac to separate from the world and sin and to focus with single-mindedness on God. The demands of sinlessness required the priest and monk to heed Isaac's words. One policed himself by comparing his actions to the standard established by the patriarch. Isaac as priestly authority also models a new relationship between the monks and clergy. In Isaac's model, one's authority is based on one's holiness and relationship with God, not by one's title. Isaac blurs the distinction between priest and ascetic in his actions and word. In the process, he becomes the patriarchal authority for both, the standard for human holiness that was needed for monks and clerics alike. Isaac's holiness is especially important as a model since clerics and monks in the future were to participate in the angelic worship and were expected to lead a holy life of retreat – implying that the two are equivalent, while their individual duties may have differed. *T. Isaac's* textual community would have learned about and acquired Isaac's holiness through the writing and reading of *T. Isaac*.

In the second dimension, Isaac as sacrifice, Isaac modeled the virtue of obedience. The members of *T. Isaac's* textual community were to be obedient to God's commands and to the commands of their father Isaac. Obedience was a virtue for monks. Isaac as sacrifice models the ideal of human obedience that the textual community should have

aspired to reach. Upon entry into the monastic community, the image of Isaac's sacrifice taught the Egyptian monastics about the sacrifice they were making. For the textual community, Isaac's sacrifice reminds them of their own sacrifice, but also God's promise. Isaac as sacrifice resulted in a new relationship with the patriarchs for the textual community, that of father and child. Further, by conforming to Isaac as sacrifice through their own ascetic sacrifice, members of the textual community became beloved of God. Finally, the members of the textual community who model themselves after Isaac as sacrifice built a relationship with the rest of the textual community as fellow children of Isaac, an alternative family that replaced the earthly family that they sacrificed upon entry into their new community.

In the third dimension, Isaac as blind ascetic, Isaac modeled appropriate ascetic behaviors for *T. Isaac's* textual community, regardless of a person's ability to see. In *T. Isaac*, Isaac's blindness is a narrative prosthesis to confirm his ascetic practices as praiseworthy. Isaac enacts ascetic practices and reports Lord-prescribed practices, as discussed in this chapter, which helped the textual community to cultivate the new self. Physical blindness did not prevent one from the life contemplation. Whether or not one was blind, they could follow Isaac's example and live the ideal contemplative life devoted to the worship of God. By following Isaac's example, and avoiding worldly matters, the members of the textual community would have been able to converse with the angels. They would have had access the divine realm while remaining physically in the earthly realm. Their access to the divine realm also led to a transformation of the members' relationship with ordinary human society. Because the textual community would have been viewed as holy ones like Isaac, ordinary humans would have sought

members of the community out to gain access to the holy.⁴⁵⁷ The textual community, if it was to live the contemplative life, would have, like Isaac, withdrawn from the ordinary world. Yet in dealing with the crowds of great ones and the priest of God while on his deathbed, perhaps Isaac as the blind ascetic offered one final example for the textual community. He shares the divinely inspired wisdom with those who came to him. The patriarch has a responsibility to pass on his knowledge to the others – as the angel commands him – and he temporarily ceases the contemplative life to perform his responsibilities to others. *T. Isaac*'s textual community had Isaac the blind ascetic as its model for the ascetic life.

The uninitiated person who came to *T. Isaac*'s textual community had a subjectivity that was not yet organized around the model of Isaac. The aim of the ascetical regimen was to transform the uninitiated into a child of Isaac, with a subjectivity modeled on the three dimensions of Isaac in *T. Isaac*. The members of the textual community were able to measure their progress by remembering Isaac and examining their self against Isaac's model.

T. Isaac's textual community read *T. Isaac* as children of Isaac to establish a new subjectivity, modeled on Isaac, with new social relationships – for example, friendship with the angels, becoming beloved of God – and a new symbolic universe. This new identity and its related subjectivity constructed an alternative self against the dominant culture.⁴⁵⁸ The subjectivity was achieved through a withdrawal and rejection of the world.

⁴⁵⁷ I imagine the relationship between the textual community and ordinary humans to be analogous to the relationship between holy ones and ordinary people depicted by Peter Brown. See Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man."; Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar."; P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Isaac's exemplary performances – sacrifices, half-the-night prayer and praise practices, fasts, and restrictions on sleep – occur when he withdrew from the world (ἀφᾶναχῶρει) to his room for one hundred years (*T. Isaac* 4.1). In his advice to the priest, Isaac exhorts the one offering a sacrifice to not mix thoughts of the world with the thoughts of God (*T. Isaac* 4.12). Isaac also encourages his descendants not to speak of or listen to talk of events of the world (*T. Isaac* 4.21) and imagines a future when all will love the life of holy *anachoresis* and renounce (ἄνεᾶποτασσε) the world and its evil cares (*T. Isaac* 4.23). Thus, the new self was not the self of the present dominant culture.

New social relationships were also established. The children of Isaac had new relationships with the angels, with the God, with the patriarchs, between each other in the community, between priest and monk, and even between them and worldly people. At the same time, the individual was expected to reject old social relationships with the world. Isaac speaks daily with the angels (*T. Isaac* 2.3). In early monastic literature, it was not uncommon for monks to speak with divine beings.⁴⁵⁹ This is a possibility to which one strived, but it would require additional preparation for the monastics to achieve a state of holiness in which they would have been able of daily conversations with the angels. The children of Isaac had a new relationship with the patriarch, that of father and child. As a community, they replaced their old familial relationships with the alternative family in

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. Valantasis, *The Making of the Self*, 3-59.

⁴⁵⁹ Collins identifies this section of the *T. Isaac* as a type of apocalypse, "an epiphany in which the revelation is mediated in dialogue form by the angel Michael." Collins, "Early Christian Apocalypses," 80. The anchorites and abbots in the third to fifth century are portrayed as having enjoyed perpetual visits from heavenly figures paralleling these apocalyptic epiphanies. Frankfurter. "The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity," 176. Cf. Paphnutius, *Life of Onnophrius* §16 and 31; Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos* §76, *Chapters on Prayer* §30, 74, 94-96, and 112; *Lives of the Desert Fathers* VIII.12, XII.3,4, XIII.7-8, XIV.2,23, XXV.2.

which they were siblings of each other. Their relationship with God was also redefined as similar to that between Isaac and the Lord. They too became beloved of God. The relationship between priests and monks became one of equals in the pursuit of the purity and holiness necessary to participate in the angelic worship of God. Finally, monks had a responsibility to those who sought them out to share the divine wisdom they had received.

To maintain this ascetical program, an alternative symbolic universe is continually re-imagined; it provided meaning to the ascetical performances related to cultivating the new self. This alternative symbolic universe allowed for members of the ascetical community to make sense of the changes that occurred within and among individuals as they constructed their new selves. It legitimated the new subjectivity and social relations. *T. Isaac* helped to construct the alternative symbolic universe for *T. Isaac's* textual community. It helped explain and legitimate the textual community's experience and communal identity as children of Isaac. A communal coming together to commemorate the death of Isaac and the reading of *T. Isaac* provided a performance that was not merely a ritualized technology of the self but also a re-legitimization of the alternative symbolic universe.

T. Isaac's textual community read *T. Isaac* as an ascetic regimen. Isaac became a model for a new subjectivity, based on three characteristics of Isaac from the Isaacic tradition – Isaac as priestly authority, Isaac as sacrifice, and Isaac as blind ascetic. In cultivating this new subjectivity, the members of the textual community transformed their selves, but also their relationships to God, angels, the monastic community, priests, and

outsiders. *T. Isaac* offers an explanation and gives meaning to the community's experience and identity as children of Isaac.

4.5 Conclusion

One might ask, why did *T. Isaac*'s textual community find in Isaac a suitable father to model itself after? After all, given the centrality of Christ for salvation, and the *imitatio Christi* imperative in early Egyptian monasticism, why would the textual community have chosen an *imitatio Isaaci*? While I believe Christ remained central for the textual community, its high Christology made it difficult for even the most pious of ascetic to be able to imitate Christ. In hopes of finding a suitable model, the biblical ancestors were ready examples for monastics. Isaac in particular would be worthy because of the tradition related to him – he was a willing and pure sacrifice to God, a priestly authority, and a blind ascetic. Isaac was ideal because he was a figure beloved by God. By choosing to identify their adoption with a human father, the textual community made a statement about their Christology. Through their own ascetical practice and moral perfection they were not able to be adopted by God; rather their own achievement remained of a human sort, exceptional though it may be. Though *T. Isaac* did not discuss God's adoption, based on its theological claims, I would speculate that for the textual community one's adoption as a child of God remained, for all intents and purposes, dependent on God's grace.

In early Egyptian monasticism, ancient biblical examples of holiness informed the monk's life and ascetic practices. *T. Isaac* provided a memory of the Isaacic tradition that was familiar to other ancient Isaacic traditions. Yet, *T. Isaac* fashioned a particular Isaac

that would have resonated with the early Egyptian monastic context: Isaac as priestly authority, Isaac as sacrifice, and Isaac as blind ascetic. As priestly authority, Isaac became the standard for holiness and purity that both priests and monks must attain to participate in the angelic service. As sacrifice, Isaac demonstrated obedience to God's will and also the reward for obedience. Isaac as sacrifice provided the promise for *T. Isaac's* textual community to become children of Isaac. As blind ascetic, Isaac provided the textual community with practices and a way of life that would allow them to contemplate and converse with the angels. By drawing on the existing Isaacic traditions, the writer of *T. Isaac* provided a familiar and somewhat expected Isaac. Yet, the writer did not passively recall tradition, the Isaac of *T. Isaac* was actively remembered in a way that reconfigured Isaac as a model relevant for the monastic context.

Finally, I have argued that *T. Isaac's* textual community read *T. Isaac* as an ascetical regimen to realize a new self. Isaac provided a threefold model for the subjectivity of the new self. The textual community performed the ascetic practices exhibited by Isaac in *T. Isaac* and heeded his words concerning ethical advice. The writing and reading of Isaac's testament would have been two of the ascetic behaviors that the textual community would have performed as part of its ascetical regimen. The ritualized performance of reading and writing would help to cultivate the new subjectivity. The textual community transformed itself into the children of Isaac, an identity that allowed them to claim Isaac as 'our father Isaac' but demanded an active remembrance of Isaac.

At the beginning of the Introduction, I implied that reading a dissertation about *T. Isaac* would be fruitful and interesting – contrary to others’ assumptions about a text that few scholars study or readily remember. I hope that has been the case. By freeing *T. Isaac* from unanswerable questions that scholars like to ask about its origins and its relationship to *T. Ab.*, I have placed *T. Isaac* into a context that seems probable, early Egyptian Christian monasticism, and allowed it to speak as its own text. I suggest that a similar approach to what I have done with *T. Isaac* in this dissertation might be beneficial for other works with uncertain origins and provenances. Such an approach may contribute to our knowledge of how biblical figures were remembered by ancient interpreters and the textual communities that remembered the biblical figures’ traditions.

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