

A

Aaron

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I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

In early texts, Aaron (*Ahārôn*) appears in non-priestly roles as Moses' brother, spokesperson, and assistant. In texts from the Second Temple period, he developed into the archetype for the office of high priest and the ancestor of all authentic priests. As different groups competed for priestly legitimacy, the ability to assert Aaronic ancestry eventually became the decisive factor.

1. Moses' Brother and Assistant. Although the historian must remain silent about Aaron's actual existence, tradition and perhaps the performance of pilgrimages assigned him a gravesite at Mount Hor near the border with Edom (Num 20:22–29; 33:38–39; Deut 32:50). Because Aaron's death outside of the land of promise was punishment for the rebellion at Meribah (Num 20:12, 24), Deut 10:6 associates his burial with the campsite Moserah, "Chastisement" (cf. Num 33:30–31). Significantly, the name Aaron is Egyptian, meaning "the name [of the god] is great." The names Moses, Phinehas, and Hophni, also associated with Israel's early priesthood, have an Egyptian connection as well. Aaron is genealogically associated with Moses as his full brother who is three years older (Exod 7:7), son of Amram and Jochebed of the Kohath clan of Levi (Exod 6:16–20).

Texts in the Pentateuch usually thought to be pre-exilic do not speak of Aaron as a priest or priestly ancestor. In material attributed to J (Yahwist Source) and E (Elohist), Aaron appears primarily as the brother of Moses (Exod 6:20; 7:7) and of Miriam (Exod 15:20). Texts outside the Pentateuch also stress Aaron's leadership role in the exodus (Josh 24:5; 1 Sam 12:6, 8; Ps 77:21 [ET 20]; Ps 105:26). Mic 6:4, the only mention of Aaron in the prophetic books, links him with Moses and Miriam as a divinely appointed exodus leader.

In the exodus narrative, God designates Aaron as Moses' spokesperson and, along with Moses' staff and a revelation of the divine name, part of his equipment for confrontation with Pharaoh (Exod 4:14–15). God explains Aaron's role to Moses using the metaphor of a prophet speaking for God (Exod 4:16; cf. 7:1–2), and his function is immediately demonstrated in the scene depicted in Exod 4:27–31. Aaron serves as Moses' assistant in other ways as well, so that "Moses and Aaron" work together as a team in confronting Pharaoh and bringing about the plagues. The paired expression "Moses and Aaron" occurs 22 times in Exod 5–12 and a total of 58 times in Exodus through Numbers. In the plague narratives Aaron's staff operates in conjunction with the staff of Moses to bring about wonderful results: Exod 7:8–12 (becoming a snake), Exod 7:19 (Nile turned to blood); Exod 8:1–2 [ET 5–6] (frogs), Exod 7:12–13 [ET 16–17] (gnats). Texts featuring Aaron's staff are conventionally assigned to the Priestly Writer (P). Aaron and the otherwise unknown Hur (cf. Exod 24:14) hold up Moses' hands to empower Joshua to victory over the Amalekites (Exod 17:8–13). At Sinai Aaron goes up with Moses and thus is explicitly differentiated from the priests, who are forbidden to approach the mountain (Exod 19:24). In the company of his two sons and the elders, Aaron sees God and participates in the ceremonial covenant meal described in Exod 24, but Moses is the only one who acts as a priest in the ritual (Exod 24:6, 8). Following this event, Moses appoints Aaron along with Hur as his interim substitutes in the role of judges (Exod 24:14). Aaron also appears as Moses' assistant in producing water from the rock at Meribah, where he likewise shares in Moses' guilt (Num 20:2–13).

2. Aaron and Bethel. Exilic and post-exilic texts portray Aaron as the ancestor of the priesthood of the Jerusalem temple. However, evidence suggests that the figure of Aaron was originally connected to the sanctuary at Bethel rather than Jerusalem. The strongest indication of an Aaronic priesthood in Bethel is the story of the golden calf (Exod 32; Deut 9). The narrative associates Aaron with the Bethel calf image cult purportedly instituted by Jeroboam I (cf. Exod 32:4, 8 with 1 Kgs 12:28). It is difficult to decide, however, whether the story is actually evidence that the priests of Bethel claimed Aaronic descent. It may be a slander directed

against Aaronic priests by a competing priestly faction, represented in the narrative by the “sons of Levi” who exhibit such admirable enthusiasm in eliminating the offenders (Exod 32:25–29). The claim by 1 Kgs 12:31 that the Bethel priesthood was not Levitical could indicate that Aaronic priests in Bethel were not yet claiming Levite ancestry, but it could equally well be a misrepresentation by anti-Aaronic priestly rivals or, more likely, by the Deuteronomistic Historian. A connection of some sort between Aaron and Bethel is also suggested by the tradition that the burial site of his son Eleazar was in Ephraim (Josh 24:33) and by the presence of Eleazar’s son Phinehas in Bethel (Judg 20:26–28). Another pointer may be the tantalizing parallel between Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu and Jeroboam’s sons Nadab and Abijah. Both sets of brothers die prematurely (Lev 10:1–2; 1 Kgs 14:1, 17; 15:25, 28).

3. Priestly Rivalries. Initially priests were not all understood to be descended from Aaron or even Levi (1 Sam 7:1; 2 Sam 8:18). Some priests were termed Levites without further categorization (Deut 18:1–8; 33:8–11; Judg 17–18). Some, such as the priesthood at Dan (Judg 18:30) and perhaps the “Mushite” clan of Levi (Num 3:33; 26:58), claimed Moses as the founder of their line. In fact, outside of Chronicles, the line of Aaron, Eleazar, and Phinehas (in Exodus through Judges is never linked up with either the family of Eli or the mysterious Zadok (in Samuel and Kings) by any explicit genealogy or claim of descent. The name of Aaron is almost completely absent from both the Deuteronomistic History and the prophetic books, and most significantly fails to appear in Ezekiel, in spite of that prophet’s own priestly background and the book’s promotion of Zadokite claims (Ezek 40:45–46; 43:19; 44:10–16; 48:11).

Several narratives implicitly expose rivalries between Aaronic and non-Aaronic priestly groups. One example is the portrayal of Aaron in the golden calf episode in Exod 32. The narrative presents Aaron in a negative light, easily yielding to the people’s apostate suggestion and excusing himself with a ludicrous lie (contrast what is reported in Exod 32:2–4 with Aaron’s self-exonerating version in Exod 32:24). Aaron’s complicity is further emphasized by a series of verbs with Aaron as subject in Exod 32:4–5 (“took,” “formed,” “cast” [literally “made”], “built,” “made a proclamation” [literally “cried out and said”]), by his faithless declaration in Exod 32:4 (“these are your gods”), and through critical comments by Moses and the narrator (Exod 32:21, 25, 35). Aaron’s low opinion of the people and attempt to distance himself from them (Exod 32:22) compares poorly with Moses’ selfless solidarity with them (Exod 32:11, 30–32). Aaron’s failures also stand in sharp contrast to the fierce zeal of the “sons of Levi” (Exod 32:25–

28) that serves as their ordination to cultic office (Exod 32:29; cf. Deut 33:9). In the Deuteronomistic version of this story, Aaron is a particular target of YHWH’s anger, and Moses’ effective intercession is required to avert the consequences of his misdeed (Deut 9:20).

Numbers 12 exalts the importance of Moses over that of Aaron and ruthlessly rejects any priestly roles that may have been claimed by women cultic personnel (cf. the holy women of Deut 23:17 and Hos 4:14 [the usual translation “temple prostitute” is open to question], the female singers in Ezra 2:65, and the enigmatic women with mirrors on duty at the sanctuary entrance in Exod 38:8; cf. 1 Sam 2:22). The objections that Aaron and Miriam raise with Moses over his foreign wife point toward disputes over cultic leadership among later groups who traced their origin to these characters: “Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?” (Num 12:2). These claims of shared legitimacy are invalidated by a stress on Moses’ exclusive standing as the one to whom YHWH relates “face to face” (Num 12:8; literally “mouth to mouth”). Miriam (but not Aaron!) is punished with leprosy and can only be restored by Moses’ intercession (Num 12:13).

Numbers 16 insists on Aaron’s exclusive priestly status in the face of claims by rival Levite groups who are represented by Korah “son of Levi” (Num 16:1, 5–11; cf. “you seek the priesthood,” Num 16:10). Korah’s appalling death (Num 16:32–33) illustrates that the priestly act of offering incense can only be carried out by “the descendants of Aaron.” The censers of those others who offended are made into an overlay for the altar as a reminder to Israel (Num 17:3–5 [ET 16:38–40]). In contrast, when Aaron is the one to offer incense, it effectively protects the people from the ensuing plague (Num 17:12–13 [ET 16:47–48]). 2 Chr 26:16–21 exhibits a similar purpose. King Uzziah is suitably punished for infringing on the exclusive privilege of “the descendants of Aaron” to offer incense (2 Chr 26:18).

Numbers 17 relates that Aaron’s name is written on a staff representing the tribe of Levi (Num 17:18 [ET 3]). In contrast to the staffs of the other tribes, it blossoms (Num 17:23 [ET 8]) and thus demonstrates that the line of Aaron possesses the only legitimate claim to priesthood and is preeminent within Levi. The staff was to be kept in the sanctuary to silence the criticism (“grumbling”) of potential rivals (Num 17:20, 25 [ET 5, 10]). Similarly, the privileges of the Aaronic line are advanced against claims of unnamed rivals when “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest” acts as the zealous hero in the Baal of Peor incident and secures a “covenant of peace” and a “covenant of perpetual priesthood” (Num 25:10–13).

4. The Second Temple Period. The Priestly Writer and Chronicles confirm that by the Second Temple period all legitimate priests were considered to be Aaronites (“sons of Aaron” [Lev 1:5] or the “house of Aaron” [Ps 115:10]). Aaron is considered to be descended from Levi through both his father and mother (Exod 6:18–20; Num 26:59), part of the clan of Kohath (Num 3:19; 26:58), but his line alone possesses the birthright of priesthood (Num 3:5–10).

The Priestly Writer reads the priesthood of the Second Temple back into the wilderness period in order to attach it securely to Aaron. Thus YHWH addresses a series of regulations about impurity to “Moses and Aaron” (Lev 11:1; 13:1; 14:33; 15:1). Laws instituting the priesthood and sacrificial cult are applied to “Aaron and his sons,” a phrase that directly corresponds to the post-exilic priesthood (for example, 1 Chr 6:34 [ET 49]; 15:4). Exodus 28–29 and Lev 1–8 describe their vestments, ordination, and ritual tasks. Leviticus 21 safeguards their holiness. Numbers 6:22–27 authorizes them to bless the people and gives the wording of the “Aaronic benediction.” Numbers 18 upholds their priestly rights over against the claims of subordinate Levites.

At several points, the Chronicler adds material to Samuel and Kings to incorporate mention of Aaron and the Aaronic priesthood (for example 1 Chr 15:4; 24:1–19; 2 Chr 29:21; 31:19; 35:14). 1 Chronicles 23:13–17 emphasizes that the descendants of Moses are definitely not priests. Chronicles considers the true Aaronic priesthood as a sign of Judah’s legitimacy in opposition to the kingdom of Israel (2 Chr 13:9–10).

Most scholars agree that the distinctive office of high priest emerged as a new development in the Second Temple period, even though certain priests had been more important than others in pre-exilic Jerusalem (2 Kgs 12:11 [ET 10]; 22:4, 8; 23:4). High priestly office combined political and religious leadership and was limited to priests claiming descent from Zadok (until the appointment of Menelaus in 172 BCE). The Priestly Writer and Chronicles portray Aaron as the first high priest. His special vestments are described in Exod 28 and his exclusive responsibilities in the Day of Atonement ritual in Lev 16.

In its final form, the Hebrew Bible portrays a straightforward and settled priestly reality. Aaron was the ancestor of all legitimate priests through his sons Eleazar and Ithamar (Num 3:1–4), and the office of high priest belonged to the family line descended from Zadok, whom Solomon appointed in place of Abiathar the scion of Eli’s house (1 Kgs 2:26–27, 35; cf. 1 Sam 2:35–36). However, it is clear that actual developments were much more complicated, involving struggles among rival priestly groups both inside and outside Jerusalem.

Eventually, a particular faction’s ability to claim Aaronic descent became the decisive factor in advancing and maintaining its privileges. Numerous theories have attempted to untangle these convoluted developments, but no consensus has emerged.

Conflicting genealogical traditions in Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah advance claims and negotiate tensions between rival priestly groups. Scholars generally agree that the Zadokite Jerusalem priesthood advanced its claim to Aaronic descent only in the Second Temple period. Ezekiel 44:10–16, for example, advances Zadokite prerogatives without mentioning Aaron. Significantly, the most trustworthy list of those who returned from exile, preserved in Ezra 2 and Neh 7, describes four families of Jerusalem priests but makes absolutely no mention of either Aaron or Zadok. In contrast, the genealogy of Ezra insists on his Aaronic and Zadokite descent (Ezra 7:1–5). One strategy used to link Zadok with Aaron appears in 1 Chr 24:1–3, where Zadok is said to be a descendant of Aaron’s son Eleazar while Ahimelech descends from Ithamar. The more usual approach was to make Zadok the son of Ahitub son of Phinehas son of Eli (2 Sam 8:17; 1 Chr 5:34; 6:35–38 [ET 6:8, 50–53]; cf. 1 Chr 27:17; Ezra 7:5). Thus the sequence “Aaron, ... Eleazar, ... Phinehas, ... Ahitub, ... Zadok, ... Jehozadak” (1 Chr 5:27–41; 6:35–38 [ET 6:1–15, 50–53]) became the conventional way of incorporating Zadok into the Aaronic genealogy.

The Bible treats Aaron as a figure of eminence and honor. His lifespan of 123 years is longer than that of Moses by three years (Num 33:39), and he is mourned by Israel the same thirty days allotted to Moses (Num 20:29; cf. Deut 34:8). Aaron is the “holy one of the LORD” (Ps 106:16). God made an eternal covenant with him and his descendants (Exod 29:9; 40:15; Jer 33:20–21; Sir 45:7, 15). His vestments are magnificent (Exod 28; Sir 45:7–13). They are woven from the same rich fabric as the tabernacle (Exod 26:1; 28:6). The precious stones in his breastplate signify the twelve tribes (Exod 28:29). The gold rosette mounted on his turban has ritual power (Exod 28:36–38). The oil of his anointing oil can serve as a metaphor for fraternal unity (Ps 133:2; cf. Exod 29:7; Lev 8:12). Liturgical address in the Psalms indicates an unambiguous division between lay and clergy in the distinction between “Israel” and the “house of Aaron” (Ps 115:10, 12; 118:3; 135:19). An artificially constructed list of Levitical towns in Josh 21 asserts the prestige and significance of the “descendants of Aaron” by assigning them locations exclusively within the kingdom of Judah, (Josh 21:9–19). In the New Testament, Aaron is invoked to describe the priestly lineage of Elizabeth (Luke 1:5) and to characterize the supposedly ineffective priesthood of the first covenant (Heb 5:4; 7:11).

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II. Judaism

■ Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism ■ Rabbinic Judaism ■ Medieval and Later Judaism

A. Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism

Whereas Moses is a source of authority or a model of leadership in the majority of forms of Judaism in the Second Temple period, the same cannot be said for his older brother Aaron. Aaron apparently left no literary legacy despite his way with words. He hurt his reputation by being associated with the golden calf incident (for which Pseudo-Philo tries to exonerate him: *L.A.B.* 12:3; as also Acts 7:40–41). His appearance is limited in Second Temple and Hellenistic Jewish literature either to those works that are interested in history broadly conceived or to those texts that are interested in the priesthood. Where he does appear, he is generally eclipsed by Moses (as in the legend of *Jannes and Jambres*, and in Pseudo-Philo's *L.A.B.*), though the fact that he is mentioned at all suggests he was held in some qualified esteem (as in *3En.* 48:7 citing Ps 99:6; also cited in *L.A.B.* 51:6). Most of his biblical roles are forgotten or ascribed to Moses alone.

As a significant historical figure Aaron is mentioned in the lists of Demetrius the Chronographer (3rd century BCE) and in the nationalistic historiography of Artapanus (3rd–2nd century BCE); both were summarized by Alexander Polyhistor and preserved by Eusebius (*Praep. ev.* IX, 21 and 27). Artapanus described the career of Moses in detail; Aaron is simply his protector and confidante. In the tragic dramatic retelling of Exodus 1–15 in the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel the Tragedian (2nd century BCE) Aaron retains his role of spokesman before Pharaoh (Exod 4:14–16). According to the *Lives of the Pro-*

phets (2.14) the resurrected Aaron will bring the ark out of the rock where Jeremiah hid it. In *2 Bar* 59:1 Aaron is mentioned after Moses as belonging to the fourth of twelve epochs of history. In *3En.* 45:4 Aaron is linked with Miriam in the historical roll call inscribed on the heavenly curtain. Sometimes this kind of brief historical reference is found in Jewish prayers such as are preserved in *Apostolic Constitutions* VII.37.2 in a list between Moses and Joshua, in VIII.5.4 as a faithful servant after Moses and before Eleazar and Phinehas, and in VIII.12.25 extolling his priesthood. The Jewish diaspora seems to be largely concerned with Aaron's place in Israel's history. An exception is Philo of Alexandria who enjoys playing with Aaron, through the pseudo-etymology "mountainous" (*Ebr.* 128), as an example of *logos* (*Leg.* 3.45, 118), the expressive and interpreting counterpart (*Migr.* 78) to Moses who is pure mind, but Aaron's subordinate status is also clear (*Leg.* 3.128).

In relation to Aaron's priesthood, predominantly a Palestinian Jewish preoccupation, Ben Sira (early 2nd century BCE) glorifies Aaron's quasi-messianic priestly status (*Sir* 45:6, 20) and seems to make him the model for the eulogy of the high priest Simon. Eleazar's priestly merit is compared with Aaron's in a similar praiseworthy way in *4Macc* 7:11–12. Priestly lineage is the issue in *1Macc* 7:12–16 (as also *Luke* 1:5). Likewise Ezra traces his priestly genealogy back to Aaron (*4Ezra* 1:3) and prioritizes the priesthood of Aaron (1:13). Pseudo-Philo retells the story of the establishment of the priesthood through the flowering rod (*Num* 17; *L.A.B.* 17:1–4; 53:9; cf. *Heb* 5:4; 9:4). The Epistle to the Hebrews (7:11) expounds the ultimate inadequacy of the Aaronic priesthood.

The concern with Aaron's priesthood dominates his appearance in the scrolls from Qumran; his name occurs there over 50 times. In several uses Aaron is the eponymous designation for the core priestly group (1QS V, 6; VIII, 9), or "men of knowledge" (CD VI, 2); sometimes this is made more specific through association with Levi (CD X, 5) or in the title "Sons of Aaron" (1QS V, 21) whose relationship to the "Sons of Zadok" is not yet clear (e.g., 1QSa I, 22–24; cf. *1Chr* 5:27–34). His name is used to designate a messiah: in the *Rule of the Community* (1QS IX, 11; ca. 100–75 BCE) mention is made of the "messiahs of Aaron and Israel." This phrase indicates an expectation of two messiahs, one priestly and one royal, with the priest taking precedence. Elsewhere the problematic "messiah of Aaron and Israel" (CD XII, 23; XIV, 19; XIX, 10) or messiah "from Aaron and from Israel" (CD XX, 1) occurs, which might suggest a single, but priestly, messiah; "Aaron and Israel" is used to describe the remnant of the true people of God (CD I, 7). When used typologically in the sectarian scrolls Aaron normally takes precedence over his non-priestly

counterpart (e.g., 1QSa II, 13; but cf. 1QM III, 14; 4Q174 5, 2).

Josephus, the historian and apologist, was a priest and so provides a sympathetic view of Aaron. He is portrayed as distinctively qualified for the priesthood because of his virtue (*Ant.* 3.118), especially in courage, self-control (*Ant.* 3.208), and piety, together with his musical abilities (*Ant.* 3.64) and prophetic gifts (*Ant.* 3.192). Josephus omits the golden calf incident from his retelling of the events at Sinai as well as several other minor incidents that might compromise Aaron's status. Much of Aaron's role in the biblical accounts is played down or omitted by Josephus, and, presumably because of Josephus' own interest in priestly lineage, it is only in passing on the high priesthood to Eleazar (*Ant.* 4.83) that he takes on a role not assigned him in the Bible.

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B. Rabbinic Judaism

Rabbinic tradition expands only a few scenes in Aaron's life. He and Miriam were born before Pharaoh's decree that all male children of the Hebrews should be thrown into the Nile; as a consequence of this decree, Amram separated from his wife and took her back only at the counsel of Miriam. This reunion was celebrated like a real wedding, with Aaron and Miriam singing at it (*bSot* 12a; *bBB* 120a: midrash built on Exod 2:1; only Exod 4:14 mentions Aaron as Moses' brother, Exod 7:7 that he is three years older than Moses). When God called Moses, he at first hesitated to accept his mission because he did not want to encroach on his brother's territory; for Aaron had prophesied in Egypt for 80 years (deduced from Exod 20:5). However, God tells him that Aaron will gladly accept to serve as Moses' interpreter with Pharaoh (*Tan* Shemot 27), meaning that Moses will speak in Hebrew and Aaron will repeat his words in Egyptian (*MekhSh* on Exod 7:2).

As in the Bible, Aaron accompanies Moses, but is always in the background. Although he is Moses' elder brother, he shows him reverence and treats him as his master, calling him "my lord" (*MekhY* Amalek 1, quoting Num 12:11). He played no role in the giving of the Torah; Moses afterwards taught him its contents; Aaron also remained present when Moses taught Aaron's sons, the elders and all the people. Thus Aaron heard the lesson four times, and then took his turn repeating the lesson for his sons etc., thus serving as an example for the rab-

binic transmission of the oral Torah by constant repetition: "If this was the case with Aaron, who learned from Moses himself, and Moses from the Almighty – in the case of a common person who is learning from a common person, all the more so!" (*bEr* 54b). It is all the more astonishing that *mAv* 1 does not include Aaron – and the priesthood in general – in its chain of tradition of the Torah.

Aaron's active participation in the sin of the Golden Calf is completely played down. Because Aaron had acted only out of fear, God was angry with him (Deut 9:20), but let only two of his sons die and elevated Aaron and his sons to the high priesthood forever (Num 25:13) (*WayR* 10:3; *Tan* Tetsaweh 10; *bSan* 7a). Aaron is again disculpated when Miriam and he gossiped against Moses, claiming that out of arrogance Moses had stopped sexual relations with his wife after God had spoken with him – Miriam is punished with leprosy whereas Aaron goes free. The rationale is that she had begun talking evil about Moses, while Aaron only joined in (Num 12:1 mentions Miriam before Aaron). While Rabbi 'Aqiva deduces from Num 12:9 that Aaron, too, was smitten with the disease (*bShab* 97a), others understand "and [he/it] departed" in Num 12:9 as referring to the punishment which "left Aaron but stuck to Miriam, for Aaron was not actively involved in the matter, but since Miriam had been actively involved, she bore the heavier punishment" (*ARN* A 9).

Aaron is passive in the scene of his consecration; only Moses is concerned about the possibility that the oil of anointment which flowed over Aaron's beard (Ps 133:2) and clung to it might be a sacrilege, but Moses is reassured by a voice from heaven (*bHor* 12a). Aaron keeps silent after the death of his sons Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:3): "He kept silence, and he got a reward for his silence" (*Sifra* Shemini Par. 1:36). His rod which blossomed to vindicate his priesthood is preserved in the ark together with the jar of manna which he had deposited there; King Josiah ordered the ark hidden so that it would not be taken away into exile like the rest of the temple utensils (*tSot* 13:1; *tYom* 2:15).

Aaron's worth became known only at his death: "When Aaron was born, no one knew but when he died, the cloud of glory was removed" (*Tan* Wayaqhel 1). Through Aaron's merits the cloud had protected Israel in the desert; once Aaron had died, it no longer protected Israel and the king of Arad attacked Israel (*tSot* 11:1 based on Num 21:1). He was one of six over whom the angel of death had no power; as Moses and Miriam, he died "by the mouth (NRSV: at the command) of the Lord" (Num 33:38), through God's kiss (*bBB* 17a). Some rabbis state that Moses and Aaron kept the entire Torah and that their case proves that there can be death without sin (*SifDev* 338). According to other rabbis they too died on account of their sin (*bShab* 55b).

When Aaron did not return with Moses, the people at first thought that Moses in his wrath had condemned Aaron to death. To prove Aaron's death, God brought his bier and held it up in the heavens; he stood in lamentation over him and the angels responded to him (*SifDev* 305). Israel in their journeying even went back eight stations, in honor of Aaron, to attend his burial (*MekhY* Wa-yassa 1, based on Deut 10:6 and Num 33:31–38). "All the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days" (Num 20:29), whereas Moses at his death was mourned only by men (Deut 34:8). *Sifra* Shemini Par. 1:37 explains this difference in treatment by virtue of the fact that Aaron never reproached anybody for his sins, whereas Moses gave a strict judgment and rebuked the people with harsh words. A small medieval midrash, *Peṭirat Aharon* (perhaps 11th century), elaborates the traditions about Aaron's death.

The dictum attributed to Hillel, "Be one of Aaron's disciples, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving humanity and bringing them near to the Torah" (*mAv* 1:12), has shaped Aaron's image in the popular imagination, but is little reflected in the rabbinic tradition outside of Avot de-Rabbi Natan. Aaron "pursuing peace" is mentioned in *Sifra* Shemini Par. 1:36 (cf. *WayR* 3:6); he appears as a peacemaker in *tSan* 1:2: "So did Moses say: Let justice pierce the mountain. But Aaron would make peace between one person and another, as it is said: 'He walked with me in peace and uprightness' (Mal 2:6)." The wording of at least part of *mAv* 1:12 is found only in the version of this tradition in *bSan* 6b: "Aaron loved peace and pursued peace and would make peace between one person and another." *ARN A* 12 expands on Mal 2:6 by telling how Aaron used to greet evil men on the street; these men then kept away from transgression, in order not to embarrass themselves before Aaron, who had dealt kindly with them. When people quarreled with one another, Aaron would sit with each of them until they had removed the envy from their hearts and they were reconciled.

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C. Medieval and Later Judaism

1. The Golden Calf Affair. Aaron's actions in the Golden Calf affair elicit a great deal of commentary in the Middle Ages, with most medieval commentators continuing the rabbinic tendency to white-wash Aaron's complicity (Exod 32). The inclusion

of specific rabbinic statements in the biblical commentary of Rashi (1040–1105, Northern France) raises the authority of those statements to a near canonical level for much of European Jewry. According to Rashi, Aaron asked the Israelites for gold as a delaying tactic to deter them from their idolatrous inclinations until Moses returned from atop Mount Sinai. He had not expected them to part so readily with their gold. Furthermore, it was the Egyptian magicians, part of the riffraff fleeing Egypt with the Israelites, who actually created the golden calf. Nevertheless, Aaron was an unintentional accessory in the ensuing act of idolatry and, as punishment (see Rashi, citing rabbinic sources), two of Aaron's sons were killed (Lev 10:1–3).

Medieval commentators demonstrate ingenuity in further exculpating and glorifying Aaron. Abraham Ibn Ezra (Spain, 1089–1164), explains that Aaron was appeasing the gentiles who were not bound by the prohibition of idolatry. Aaron mistakenly believed that the Israelites would not engage in idolatry. Indeed, as Ibn Ezra and other medieval commentators noted, only a small fraction, 3,000 out of a population of 600,000, were slaughtered as punishment for their idolatry (Exod 32:28).

Another stream of medieval commentary, represented by Joseph Bekhor Shor (1130–1200, Northern France) and Naḥmanides (1194–1270, Spain), suggested that the people demanded a human leader to take the place of Moses. This school of interpretation reads *elohim* in verse one as *judge* rather than *God*. Aaron reasoned that were he to appoint another leader, a civil war might erupt when Moses did return. Aaron, therefore, built the calf precisely because it had no intrinsic power, and Moses could summarily destroy it upon his return. Again, Aaron did not expect that there would be those who would turn the calf into an idol.

Although the consensus among medieval biblical commentators was that Aaron neither committed idolatry nor intended the Israelites to do so, Aaron was guilty of inadvertently creating the situation in which idolatry was committed. Deuteronomy 9:20 was understood by many medieval commentators as proof that, had it not been for Moses' intercession, Aaron too would have been killed immediately for his part in the Golden Calf affair. Baḥya ben Asher (1263–1340, Spain) points out that Aaron's sin was not worthy of the death penalty, but God is more exacting with those who are pious and righteous.

Although some modern traditionalists continue to cast Aaron's involvement with the Golden Calf in the most favorable light, there are voices of dissent. Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888, Germany) blamed Aaron for not risking his life by standing up to the rebels amongst Israel who demanded an idol. Hirsch believed that Aaron was attempting to

slow down the leaders of the rebellion by unhurriedly building the idol himself. Hirsch advocated a more forceful and forthright approach, both for Aaron and against the forces of assimilation and reform in Hirsch's own native Germany.

Another traditionalist, Meir Leib ben Yehiel Michael or Malbim (1809–1879, Central Europe), defended Aaron's right to save his own life from the frenzied crowd. For Malbim, Aaron's sin was not protesting when the Israelites began their worship of the Golden Calf. Malbim's own polemical thrusts against the emerging Reform movement indicate that he was not about to repeat what he saw as the sin which prevented Aaron from entering the Promised Land.

2. Aaron as Mediator. In the mystical tradition, Aaron, the high priest, was conceived as responsible for channeling divine blessings from the supernal worlds to our own. Of course, when there is no longer a high priest, the mystic assumes the role of consciously drawing down the divine munificence through ritual acts. In the Hasidic tradition, the *tsaddiq* symbolized the high priest who could not only bring God's blessing down, but help his followers go "up" to God. The Hasidic *tsaddiq* functioned as the mediator between God and his followers just as Aaron, the archetypal high priest, had in the biblical period. One Hasidic master, Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt (1748–1825, Poland), identified himself as the reincarnation of a temple high priest (Green 1994). In another Hasidic source, Aaron is understood as a *tsaddiq* whose death atones for his people (Greenberg). This atoning function explains why Aaron wears his priestly vestments when he ascends the mountain upon which he will die (Num 20:26–28).

3. Aaron as Exemplar of Humility. Another strand within Jewish pietism holds Aaron up as an exemplar of humility. Baḥya ibn Paquda (fl. 1040, Spain), author of the influential *Duties of the Heart*, comments that Aaron, although the high priest, still disposed of the ashes from the animal sacrifices himself (Lev 6:10). Hasidic master Judah Leib Alter of Ger (1847–1905, Poland) went further and said that Aaron's shame was a sign of his perfection. According to Judah Leib, it is through shame, an emotion on the decline in our times, that one can fully embrace the traditional commandments with which God has graced the Jewish people (Green 1998: 162–63).

4. Aaron the Silent One. Recently, Elie Wiesel has raised further questions concerning Aaron's character. Wiesel criticizes Aaron for never speaking up. Aaron remains silent when the Israelites initially clamored for an idol to replace Moses (Exod 32:2). At the waters of Meribah (Num 20:1–13), Aaron neither defends his brother nor accepts a share of the responsibility. Previous commentary attributed responsibility to Aaron for the death of two of his

sons. Wiesel claims that Aaron's silence (Lev 10:3) upon learning of their death was borne of guilt for his own complicity in the Golden Calf affair. A survivor of the Shoah, Wiesel will not countenance passivity or silence in the face of impropriety.

5. Aaron the Peacemaker. The passage in *Avot* 1:12 referring to Aaron as a lover and pursuer of peace has made this aspect of his character better known than most, due to the popularity of *Avot* and its frequent study, especially in the weeks between Passover and Shavuot. This passage was recently highlighted by the Conservative movement which included an adaptation of it in its new edition of the daily prayer book as the conclusion of the morning blessings: "... May we be disciples of Aaron the Kohen, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving our fellow creatures and drawing them near to the Torah" (Cahan: 70; Harlow: 18).

6. Aaron's Death. There developed in the Middle Ages legends surrounding Aaron's death largely woven from rabbinic material. One version appears in the medieval midrash, *Yalqut Shim'oni* (§764), and another in a short work entitled *Midrash Petirat Aharon*. According to the latter, not only was it difficult for Moses to tell Aaron of his impending death, but Aaron was so beloved that it was difficult for God to so instruct Moses. *Midrash Petirat Aharon* shows Moses going through different ruses to hint to Aaron that it was time for him to die. Aaron, finally sensing the truth, accepts his death with equanimity. His son, Eleazar, inherits his position as high priest, his brother escorts him to his burial chamber, and in the *Yalqut* version, God takes Aaron's soul with a kiss. As with many medieval midrashim written in the aftermath of the Crusades, the sentiment expressed is that it is good to die for God, and God reciprocates by providing a good death.

Midrash Petirat Aharon concludes on a fascinating note. Already in the rabbinic material, God's protective clouds of glory were attributed to Aaron's merits. When Aaron died, those clouds disappeared. When the clouds lifted, and those born in the desert saw the sun and the moon for the very first times in their lives, they wanted to worship the heavenly forms. God himself had to then speak to the Israelites and warn them against doing so (Deut 4:19). Thus, the loss of Aaron and the clouds of glory exposes the Israelites anew to the perils of idolatry, suggesting that Aaron had previously attempted to dissuade the Israelites from committing idolatry but was unsuccessful. His effort, which ultimately cost him his life, was rewarded with the appearance of the clouds of glory that temporarily protected the people Aaron loved from further idolatrous temptations.

In addition to the explanation that Aaron's death was a consequence of his complicity in the Golden Calf episode, another line of interpretation

links it to Aaron's behavior at the Waters of Meribah (Num 20). Hayyim ben Moses Ibn Attar argued that someone of Aaron's great stature should have rebuked Moses for hitting the rock to bring forth water when God had said only to speak to it. According to Ibn Attar, the failure to confront his brother was an act of rebellion against God for which he was punished.

In sum, Aaron, through the prism of generations of commentary, is understood as a flawed but beloved leader. Rabbinic and medieval commentators emphasized his pure motivations and his sincere love for Israel. For commentators since the Enlightenment, Aaron's actions became examples of pitfalls to avoid as Jewish leaders confronted the unprecedented challenges of modernity.

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Shai Cherry

III. New Testament

1. Occurrence in the New Testament. In all the books of the NT the name Aaron only occurs five times: three times in the Epistle to the Hebrews, twice in Luke-Acts. Compared with the importance of Aaron and the sons of Aaron for early Jewish writings, this observation alone is significant and demonstrates the lack of interest in Aaron and the Aaronic priesthood in large parts of early Christianity. This lack of interest is not merely due to the fact that many NT texts were written after the destruction of the Jewish temple: both Luke-Acts and Hebrews were written after this event, while Paul, who lived at the time of the Second Temple and knew it from experience, never mentions Aaron and his priests or refers to them anywhere in his theological argument. Apparently Aaron did not offer any help for the developing Christian thought until after the destruction of the temple, and even then the Aaron traditions were only very rarely used.

2. Aaron in Luke-Acts. Aaron has a marginal role in Luke-Acts: In the Gospel of Luke he is only mentioned once, as the ancestor of the priests. In Luke 1:5, Elizabeth is introduced as the wife of the priest Zechariah and a "descendant of Aaron." This

reference serves to illustrate the priestly background of John the Baptist.

The name Aaron also appears in Acts 7:40 in a reference to the biblical account of the golden calf in Exod 32. In the context of Stephen's speech the people's request to Aaron to build the golden calf (Exod 32:1) is quoted in as example of Israel's disobedience against God's laws (Acts 7:38–43). Only the reaction of the people in the episode of the golden calf is important for the argument, Aaron's part in it is merely incidental.

3. Aaron in Hebrews. The only passage where Aaron has any fundamental theological importance is the epistle to the Hebrews. Although Aaron only occurs three times in the whole writing, the Levitical priesthood is inextricably linked with Aaron. Early Jewish sources attest to the relevance of the priests and particularly the high priest: they govern the Jewish "theocracy" (Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.165; cf. *A.J.* 14.41; Horbury: 228). The high priest prays not only for himself but for the whole nation (Josephus, *A.J.* 3.189; 2 Macc 15:12; Philo, *Spec.* 1.97; 3.131). Similarly in Heb 5:1–4 the compassion and imperfection of the high priest are described, who offers sacrifices for his own sins as well as for those of the nation. This reference to the historical duties of the high priest ends with a reference to the office's calling: "And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was" (v.4). Aaron did not seize the priesthood, he received it from God. In the same way the priesthood was given by God to Christ (v.5). Ancient Jewish views point out that Aaron received the high priesthood on account of his virtue (Josephus, *A.J.* 3.188; *C. Ap.* 2.186; Philo, *Mos.* 2.142) and regard the priests as "blameless" (Wis 18:21) and immaculate (Josephus, *A.J.* 3.279). By contrast, the epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes that they are not without faults (Heb 5:2–3; 7:27–28; 9:7; 13:11), as they have to offer sacrifices for their own sins (Lev 16:6; 17:6; *Yom* 3.8; 4.2, cf. Horbury: 246–48).

In Heb 7:11 the "priest according to the order of Melchizedek," Christ, is contrasted to "one according to the order of Aaron," that is the Levitical priesthood. The Levitical priesthood (v.9) is identified with the Aaronic priests (v.11), so that with "the order of Aaron" the whole of the temple service is implied. Due to the link between priesthood and the political government, the priesthood is also connected with the law, particularly as the Torah was received under the Aaronic priesthood (v.11). Therefore, according to Heb 7:12 any change in the priesthood must lead to a change in the law (Horbury: 236–42). This change from the Aaronic priesthood to the one according to Melchizedek is necessary as the Aaronic priests cannot attain perfection, neither for themselves nor for others: The Levitical priests are mortal (Heb 7:23), sinful (v.27)

and cannot therefore attain permanent redemption (Heb 9:12) or lasting forgiveness of sins (10:18).

In Heb 9:4 there is a reference to “Aaron’s rod that budded” (Num 17:1–13), listed in Heb 9 among other contents of the tabernacle, including the ark of the covenant, the urn with manna and the tablets of the covenant. The rod is not explained in any detail, but in Num 17 it is the symbol that the Aaronic priests were chosen to mediate between God and his people. Philo turns this into the view that Aaron is the spoken word of God (Philo, *Migr.* 78; *Det.* 39, 126). The fact that Hebrews mentions the rod shows that the author is aware of the relevance of the high priests’ mediating function.

Thus in Hebrews Aaron and the priests represent the sacrificial order which has been replaced and perfected by Christ. The author is familiar with Second Temple traditions around the temple and the priests; however, he criticizes them and offers a contrasting picture of the surpassing priesthood of Christ.

4. Conclusion. In the NT Aaron appears as ancestor of the priestly line. Details of his history are known, such as the episode of the golden calf in Exod 32 and that of his rod in Num 17. But the personhood of Aaron is less important than the idea of Aaron’s priesthood, a priesthood for the Christians no longer relevant in its mediating function. This is the reason for both, the use of Aaron as a symbol of the historical priesthood in Hebrews and the lack of interest in him displayed in almost all the other NT writings.

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Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer

IV. Archaeological Evidence

Numbers 20:22–23 named the place of Aaron’s death as Mount Hor. Flavius Josephus (1st cent. CE) specified this place as a high mountain on the border of Edom, in the area of Petra which can be identified with Jabal Harun, a mountain located ca. 5 km southwest of Petra. This identification was accepted in the early 4th century by Eusebius, by St Jerome and later historians.

The burial place of Aaron did not attract much attention by early pilgrims, although some historical and/or archaeological data (*infra*) indicate the presence of a Byzantine monastery on the plateau of the mountain and a church on its summit. After the Islamic conquest, the place remained in the hands of Christians. Al-Mas’udi (mid-10th century) mentioned the tomb and listed Jabal Harun as a holy mountain in the possession of the Chalcedonians.

In 1100, Fulcher of Chartres accompanied the Crusader army under Baldwin to the Wadi Musa

area. He accompanied Baldwin to the “Monastery of Saint Aaron,” on the mountain which therefore must be the monastery on the high plateau. Gilbert the Abbot (1053–1125) specified that Baldwin entered the church of Aaron in order to pray, most probably a structure at the monastery rather than the church on the summit. Magister Thetmar saw the mountain during his visit to Petra in 1217. He did not ascend the mountain, but he mentioned two Greek monks as living there. The monastic presence ceased soon after the visit, apparently before the construction of the Muslim shrine (*weli*) on the summit in the 14th century.

The Arab chronicler Nuwairi, following the history of the voyage of Sultan Baybars from Cairo to Kerak in 1276, referred to the tomb of Aaron on the way up from the Wadi ‘Araba, but no human presence there. Abulfeda (Abû al-Fidâ, 1273–1331) stated in his Geography: “Tur Harun is the name of a high, overtowering mountain to the south of Jerusalem. The tomb of Aaron is located on its top” (Abû al-Fidâ 1840: 69). In the 14th century, a Muslim shrine was constructed on the summit of the mountain, above the remains of the church largely obliterating the remains of that church.

Medieval Jewish pilgrim sources also speak of Jabal Harun. Rabbi Jacob (1238–1244) notes: “It is three days’ journey on the road thence [from Sodom and Gomorrah] to Mount Hor where Aaron is buried” (Adler 1966: 127) in a list of tombs outside the Holy Land. A list of Jewish pilgrimage sites, apparently compiled by the Egyptian Jew Yit-gadel in 1371, also included Aaron’s tomb in Petra. An anonymous record, dated to the year 1537, provided a similar description. In 1851, Rabbi Yehezkel mentioned earlier visits of Jewish pilgrims in 1624 and 1732.

The discussion on the location of the tomb and a monastery of Aaron in Petra was rekindled by the discovery of the Petra papyri in 1993. These documents mostly concern property transactions in Petra and its environs between 537 and 593. The unpublished Petra papyrus inv.6a – the last will of Obodianus son of Obodianus, dated to 573 (?) and written in Petra – mentions “the Sacred House of our Lord the St High-Priest Aaron,” which is situated outside the city, and represented by the Superior (ἡγούμενος) of St High Priest Aaron. This institution is one of the two beneficiaries, the other being “the most distinguished Hospital (or Hostel) of the St and Triumphant Martyr Cyricus, situated in this city,” and represented by Theodoros son of Obodianos, the archdeacon of Saint Mary (the Petra church) and the key person in the archive. Because of the occurrence of the terms “Sacred House,” Ἁγίος Οἶκος in Greek, *Domus* in Latin, and the title of ἡγούμενος, the papyrus certainly refers to a monastic complex dedicated to Aaron near Petra.

In the early 20th century, T. Wiegand described the remains of a church on the summit of Jabal

Harun, located under the *weli*. But the ancient sources and the results of the early explorations imply that the Monastery of Saint Aaron is located on the plateau of the mountain. The Finnish Jabal Harun Project (FJHP) carried out comprehensive investigations of the site between 1997 and 2007. Initially, the site was occupied by a Nabataean “high place” sanctuary, a cistern, a triclinium and other rooms, all probably of the 1st century BCE/CE date. In the later 5th century, a monoapsidal basilica with adjacent chapel were built at the site, associated with several rooms, a hostel quarter and courtyards, forming a large enclosed rectangle. This Byzantine monastic center which incorporated the earlier Nabataean remains, had a clearly memorial character associated with pilgrimages. The church was richly decorated with marble chancel furnishings, marble floors, glass wall mosaics and the mosaic floor in the narthex. The church and the chapel underwent several phases of remodeling, following episodes of destruction, probably of a seismic nature. The ecclesiastical occupation of the church ended by the late 8th century and the chapel by the 9th, but other structures were probably still in use by the Crusader period.

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V. Christianity

In Christian tradition, Aaron the high priest of ancient Israel is usually a typological prefigurement of Christ, the ordained clergy, or the entire church as the priestly people of God. All three interpretations appear frequently in early Christian writers, especially with reference to biblical passages referring to Aaron in Exodus, Leviticus, and Hebrews. For example, Origen says in his *Homilies on Leviticus* that Aaron and his sons are mystically understood

as Christ and his apostles, but he also admonishes all the faithful that they too are priests of the Lord.

The identification of Aaron as a symbolic type yielded various theological, ethical, and sacramental meanings. Like Aaron, Christ and his clergy do not assume the priesthood for themselves but are called by God (Ambrose). As Aaron was anointed with chrism, Christian believers are also anointed at baptism (Cyril of Jerusalem). When Christians read in Num 16:47 about Aaron offering incense to make atonement for the people, they are reminded of Christ who defeated death by offering the incense of his spirit in the censer of his human flesh (Caesarius of Arles). Recalling some of Jerome’s fanciful etymologies, Bede suggested that Aaron (“mountain of fortitude”) and Hur (“fire” or “light”), who governed the people while Moses was on Mount Sinai, represent Christ and the Holy Spirit who are ever present in the lives of the faithful.

Similar typologies continue throughout the medieval period and into the Reformation era. Thus in a sermon on Heb 9, Martin Luther preached that as Christ offered himself in his heart before God, so Christians as the “posterity of Christ our Aaron” must offer their own bodies as a spiritual sacrifice. John Calvin observed that Moses was a prophet and Aaron a priest, and that both offices belong to Christ. Remarkably, John Wesley applied the reference to Aaron’s vocation in Heb 5:4 to ordained clergy who are not to assume the priesthood unless their inward calling is confirmed by church authorities, but not to his Methodist preachers since, unlike Aaron, they were not called to exercise a priestly ministry.

Many Christian writers provided elaborate allegorical interpretations of Aaron’s priestly vestments. For Clement of Alexandria, the high priest’s robe symbolized the sensible universe that Christ put on at his incarnation. Origen admonished all Christians to let their rational understanding be a spiritual high priest adorned with the virtues represented by Aaron’s tunic (chastity), bejeweled robe (good works), breastplate and headplate (message of the gospel), undergarments (purity), and bells (proclamation of the end of the world). Most patristic writers followed Origen’s ecclesial interpretation, but Gregory the Great and Bede saw the priestly vestments as indicating qualifications and virtues specifically requisite for Christian pastors and teachers.

Various meanings have been drawn from Aaron’s close association with his brother Moses. Identifying Moses with knowledge of the law and Aaron with skill in making sacrifices, Origen concluded that Christians must combine faith with the fruits of good works. For Gregory of Nyssa, Moses was the Christian soul in pursuit of perfection while the elder brother Aaron played an ambivalent

role, representing both the soul's guardian angel and an agent of demonic temptation. Augustine explained that Exod 4:16 says Aaron will be Moses' mouth (and thus his subordinate) and Moses will be to Aaron as God because Moses was mediator between God and Aaron, but Aaron was mediator between Moses and the people. In the 12th century, Richard of St. Victor taught that some persons are like Moses on Mount Sinai because they acquire the ecstasy of contemplation only infrequently and as a special divine gift, whereas others are like Aaron returning regularly to the Holy of Holies because they can achieve ecstasy almost at will; the same contrast is repeated in the 14th-century *Cloud of Unknowing*.

Although many early and medieval Christian interpreters followed Acts 7:39–41 in using the episode of the golden calf in Exod 32 as material for polemic against alleged Jewish apostasy, they often tried to excuse Aaron's apparent complicity on the grounds that it was motivated by his desire to delay or thwart the people's idolatrous intentions (Bori 1990). In 1606, François de Monceaux published an essay *Aaron Purgatus* in which he argued that Aaron only meant for the calf to serve in the place of the cherubim in the tabernacle. However, other Christian writers simply acknowledged that however much he was a type of Christ, Aaron was also a fallible human in need of God's mercy. Calvin suggested that Aaron originally demanded the people's gold earrings as a ploy to dissuade them from idolatry by making it costly for them, but in his weakness finally acquiesced in forging the calf. So it is, says Calvin, with all those who attempt to compromise with evil.

In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Aaron is honored as a Christian saint. Before 842 when the First Sunday of Lent was designated as the Sunday of Orthodoxy, Aaron was commemorated on that day along with Moses, Samuel and other prophets. Now Moses and Aaron are often commemorated together on September 4.

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VI. Islam

Aaron (*Hārūn*) is known to Islam mainly as the brother of Moses who accompanies Moses to the court of the Pharaoh and is one of the principal actors in the golden calf apostasy at Mount Sinai. Muslims consider Aaron a prophet among many others in a prophetic line from Adam to Muḥammad.

Aaron's name appears 20 times in the Qur'ān. Scholars suggest the form *Hārūn* entered Arabic from Hebrew, or perhaps from Syro-Palestinian. Aaron is included in a list of prophets to whom God "revealed," such as Noah, Abraham and Jesus (S4:163; cf. S6:84). The portrait of Aaron in the Qur'ān emerges from differing versions – what John Wansbrough termed "variant traditions" – of the Moses narrative in many different *sūras* of the Qur'ān. When God calls Moses to go and speak before Pharaoh, Moses asks God to make Aaron his minister (*wazīr*) (S20:29–30). Moses says he fears he will not communicate well (S20:25–28), and needs his brother's help for eloquence and confirmation (S28:34; S20:29–32). In a third tradition, Moses asks for Aaron's presence because he fears the people of Pharaoh will kill him, for they "have a sin against me" (S26:14). God grants Moses his request. Aaron and Moses express their fear of what Pharaoh may do to them, and God promises his presence with them (S20:46). The two brothers then appear before Pharaoh and engage in a contest of miraculous signs with the sorcerers whom the Pharaoh summons. The sorcerers are outdone and finally confess belief in "the Lord of Moses and Aaron" (S7:122; S20:70; S26:48).

Aaron and Moses are explicitly paired for a number of divine favors, including deliverance, help, guidance and "the manifesting book" (S37:114–118). Elsewhere (S21:48) the book given to these two seems to be called the *furqān* ("The Criterion/Standard"). God leaves to the following generations to say, "Peace be upon Moses and Aaron" (S37:120).

In the three scriptural accounts of the worship of the calf by the children of Israel, Aaron plays an ambiguous role. The first account in the canonical progression does not mention Aaron (S2:54). In *Sūra* 7, Moses installs Aaron as his own representative (*khalāfa*), then goes away for 40 nights (S7:142). When Moses returns to the people, he is angry and grieved to see that the people have taken the calf to worship. He throws down the tablets and seizes Aaron by the head (S7:150). Aaron explains that the people have abased him and nearly killed him. Moses then asks his Lord for forgiveness and mercy for himself and Aaron (S7:151). However, in *Sūra* 20 it is not Aaron but a Samaritan (*Sāmīrī*) who leads the people astray (S20:85). In this account Aaron tries to prevent the people of Israel from worshipping the calf, but Moses holds him responsible for not making a greater effort (S20:90–94).

In the Qur'ān, Mary the mother of Jesus is called "the sister of Aaron" (S19:28). Elsewhere she is described as "the daughter of 'Imrān" (S66:12; cf. S3:35). This apparent conflation between her and Mīriam the sister of Aaron and Moses gave rise to accusations of errors in the Qur'ān

from a very early stage of Muslim-Christian encounter, as well as to extensive Muslim explanations of these verses.

The stories about biblical figures in the Qurʾān are allusive and elliptical, as if a speaker were referring to stories already known by the listeners. Further details about these figures, as well as complete narrative structures, were provided in works of Qurʾānic commentary, *sīra* (biography of the prophet of Islam), *ḥadīth* (traditions attributed to the prophet of Islam), *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (tales of the prophets), and Muslim histories. In his *Strā*, for example, Ibn Ishāq (d. 767) explains that in the matter of the golden calf Aaron was steadfast but the Samaritan tricked him. Al-Kisāʾī (12th cent.) says that prior to accompanying Moses, Aaron works in the presence of the Pharaoh as one of his ministers. When Moses comes to speak to the Pharaoh, Aaron steps forward from his place at court to support his brother. Al-Kisāʾī also writes that after the Angel of Death takes the spirit of Aaron while the two brothers are in a cave, the children of Israel accuse Moses of killing Aaron. Abraham Geiger found parallels between this last tale and the *Midrash Tanhuma*.

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Gordon Nickel

VII. Literature

In the Bible and in literature, Aaron always stands with Moses, usually in his shadow. For literature in the Christian tradition especially, Aaron the priest typically compares unfavorably to his brother Moses. The episode of the Golden Calf predominates, but there are also favorable references to the priestly office and paraphernalia of Aaron, such as "gifts, sweet as from Aaron's urn" (Sebastian Evans, "Brother Fabian's Manuscript," 1865). Other priestly objects are his priestly oil ("And holy oil/ On Aaron's head," Evans) and jeweled breastplate (J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1667). Like Moses, Aaron is sometimes depicted with a rod that symbolizes church governance: "Aarons rodde also doth signifie his worde, By the whiche his church is gouerned here" (Miles Hogarde [or Huggarde], *The Assault of the Sacrament of the Altar*, 1554).

Aaron is sometimes linked to Jesus, for example as the victim

of Satan's temptation in John Bayle's 1547 *A Breve Comedy Or Enterlude Concernyng The Temptacyon Of Our Lorde And Sauer Iesus Christ, By Sathan In The Desert*: "Thus dedyst thu deceyue, both Moses and Aaron, Causyng them to doubt, at the lake of contraryccyon." The transition from didactic and allegorical literature to early modern literature brings us a more political Aaron, who (like Moses) lends himself to polemic of many kinds.

Zora Neale Hurston carries the anti-Aaron polemic to an extreme in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939). Set in an African-American context, Hurston's novel depicts Aaron calling Moses "boss-man" and "big high cockadoo," and Moses replies, "Your whole body is nothing but a big bag to tote your littleness in." Moses later kills Aaron when he continues to threaten Moses' nation-building goals.

In Louis Untermeyer's 1928 *Moses*, the priestly stereotype is rendered humorous in this dialogue between Moses and Aaron:

"Ten are enough. They constitute the Law."

"What can you mean, Moses? The Law? There will have to be hundreds of laws, strictures, definitions ... Specific rules. Plenty of them. For every occasion. Rewards and penalties."

Though he never rivals Moses as a Romantic hero, Aaron is the subject of a key sub-plot in Chateaubriand's tragedy, *Moïse* (1861), struggling between loyalty to the people and his son, Nadab, who has offered "strange fire" to God. Another sympathetic Aaron appears in Sholem Asch's 1951 *Moses*, which details the priestly accoutrements and sacrifices. After Aaron pronounces the Levite blessing, "a ray of light fell from heaven upon all the people that stood about the tabernacle." Moses' antagonist in Asch's novel is not Aaron but Korah, though Aaron does bear some responsibility for the criticism he and Miriam level against Moses.

Modern novels show the stamp of their times even as they preserve traditional images of Aaron. In Werner Jansen's "Rasseroman" *Die Kinder Israel* (1927), Aaron recites the Hymn to the Aten, linking the newly-discovered religion of Amarna to ancient Israel. Leon Kolb's *Moses the Near Easterner* (1956) imagines a large religious bureaucracy when Moses appoints Aaron as head priest within the "Department of Symbolism."

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Brian Britt

VIII. Visual Arts

In art, Aaron is rarely represented alone (see → plate 1.a). Marc Chagall painted a glowing scene of him meeting Moses in the wilderness, having been inspired by God to seek out his brother. The 1966 image, dominated by dark blues and greens is far

more muted than is the norm for Chagall. Among the more interesting images of him in action with Moses before the pharaoh is the 1647 painting by Nicolas Poussin, in which both brothers gesture toward heaven and Aaron toward the serpent which, at his feet, begins to dispatch the snakes of the Egyptian priests, while Moses gestures toward the pharaoh himself, as if in warning that this moment is a foretaste of the power of the God of Israel. The renowned 19th-century French engraver Gustave Doré portrayed the two brothers, towering over the snake, standing in a fancifully Egyptianate, squared arena, surrounded by high walls and soaring columns behind which the Egyptians crowd and gesticulate.

This most famous of Aaronic scenes has also been used toward a political purpose, as in the 1537 French oil painting of the subject as “An Allegory of the Dinteville Family,” in which an anonymous artist used the faces of two of the Dinteville brothers for those of Moses and Aaron. In rendering the tightly composed scene as a contemporary royal court, he has thinly disguised his pharaoh as King Francis I. Conversely, the contemporary digital work by Ted Larson – like Doré, a prolific visual explorer of biblical passages – presents a rigid, Hollywood-inspired serpent thrusting diagonally across the picture plane (so that no humans are actually visible) as if the staff has been captured at the moment of transformation.

While the occasional contemporary sculpture focuses on Aaron alone within the pharaonic court – such as “Aaron’s Rod,” by Phillip Ratner, in which the stylized and attenuated figure of the servant of God, Byzantine in its flatness, paradoxically surges with spiritual power – the most logical context in which one might see him portrayed without Moses is when he presides over the manufacture of and dancing around the Golden Calf. But more usually it is the calf itself that becomes the artistic focus. Occasionally a contemporary artist such as Larson will depict Aaron where the scriptural text does not – kindling the seven-branched candelabrum within the tabernacle that is described in Exod 25:31–40. Thus his role as first high priest in Israel, engaged in God’s service, is underscored. And indeed, he is sometimes represented simply as the high priest within the temple precincts, as on the wall of the 3rd-century synagogue of Dura-Europos on the Euphrates River.

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Ori Z. Soltes

IX. Music

In Western music, the figure of Aaron is primarily represented in oratorios and operas dealing with the narratives of Moses and the Israelites on their

way to the land of Canaan, as in Handel’s *Israel in Egypt* (1738), Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach’s *Die Israeliten in der Wüste* (1768–69), Gioachino Rossini’s azone tragico-sacra, *Mosè in Egitto*, a sacred opera seria staged during Lent in Naples in 1818 and revised for Paris in 1827, as well as Arnold Schoenberg’s unfinished opera *Moses und Aaron* (1930–32).

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Nils Holger Petersen

See also → Aaron’s Rod; → Moses

Aaron ben Elijah

Religious philosopher, legal authority, commentator, and poet, Aaron ben Elijah “The Younger” of Nicomedia (1328?–1369) transformed Byzantine Karaite scholarship. An eclectic and a synthesizer, he drew equally upon Karaite and Rabbanite sources. His three major works, written in a fluent rabbinic Hebrew, are largely devoted to biblical exegesis. His theological *summa*, *Sefer ‘Ets hayyim* (“The Tree of Life,” 1346), modeled on Moses Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* and the *Muhtawī* of the Karaite Yūsuf al-Baṣīr (11th cent.), contains discussions of biblical anthropomorphisms, the divine names, the trials of Abraham and Job, prophecy, and the divine commandments. While Aaron sometimes adopts Maimonidean interpretations, he frequently critiques the *Guide’s* positions. His treatment of Job’s afflictions, for example, describes two lines of interpretation: “The Karaite sages claimed that they were the sufferings of love, while the Rabbanite sages maintained that they were sufferings which were [consequent] upon [his] deserts” (ch. 90). Aaron criticizes previous readings of the book, both Karaite and Rabbanite, by adducing troublesome verses. In his view, God inflicted misery upon Job so that he would attain spiritual perfection, while receiving compensation for his suffering. He ascribes an allegorical significance to Job as well: “Indeed, this is a valid symbol for Israel: for if [the people of] Israel pervert their spiritual existence, they are punished in their physical existence” (ibid.).

Aaron’s most influential work is unquestionably his code, *Sefer Gan ‘eden* (1354), which presents Karaite law in a clear, accessible manner. Since the Karaites continued to justify, if not derive, all of their laws through recourse to scripture and reason, Aaron’s book contains lengthy exegetical portions. The section devoted to the Feast of Weeks, for example, includes a long demonstration that the word *shabbat* in Lev 23:15 refers to the Sabbath after the commencement of Passover and not – as the Rabbanites maintain – to the first day of the festival.