

“A Model of Christ”: Melito’s Re-Vision of Jewish Akedah Exegeses

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The writings of Melito, a second-century bishop of Sardis, reveal simultaneously the tensions and connectedness of early Jewish Christian relations. As the first to virulently accuse Israel of killing the Lord (*Peri Pascha* 72, 74, 87), Melito has been designated a poet of deicide.¹ Paradoxically, his work also displays a prevalent influence of Jewish tradition. The few details we know of his life verify this view.² Eusebius cites a letter by Melito in which he claimed to have visited the Holy Land to obtain “precise information about the Old Testament books.”³

Melito’s scriptural fluency emerges in his extant writings, particularly in his *Peri Pascha* (*PP*), his major complete work, as well as in his *Fragments*.⁴ Melito’s likely knowledge of Jewish exegeses on Genesis 22 (the Akedah, i.e., the

¹ Phyllis Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred: The History of Anti-Semitism* (Brookline, MA: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, 2012), 31, summarizes:

...about 167CE Melito gave a sermon entitled “Homily on the Passover” [where] he argued that by “crucifying Jesus,” the Jews had “murdered God” and therefore the Jewish people as a whole were guilty of the crime. His homily is the first known use of the deicide charge (as the accusation was later known). His goal was not to incite violence against Jews but to strengthen the Christian identity of his parishioners...only in later centuries would Melito’s words be used to justify discrimination, persecution and murder.

Also see Jeremy Cohen, *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen* (Oxford/New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 69, who understands that “[casting] the Jew as killer of Christ proves essential to Melito’s status and self-concept as a Christian.” For an insightful study on the presentation of Jews and Judaism in Melito, see Judith Lieu, *Image and Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second-Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

² Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, is the main source of information on Melito of Sardis. See *Historia ecclesiastica* (*HE*) 5:24. *Patrologia graeca* 20. For online access, refer: http://khazarzar.skeptik.net/pgm/PG_Migne/Eusebius%20Caesariensis_PG%2019-24/

For an English translation, see *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, ed. Andrew Louth, trans. G. A. Williamson (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 172. According to Eusebius, Melito was a Quartodeciman, celebrating the Paschal festival on the 14th of Nissan, tied to the Jewish Passover, rather than the (Roman) practice of celebrating the day of Resurrection on a Sunday.

³ *HE* 4:26, *History of the Church*, 135. Also *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha and Fragments*, ed. Stuart Hall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979). Hall notes in his introduction, xxx, that this is the “first use of the term *Old Covenant* or *Old Testament* to refer to the Bible.”

⁴ See Eusebius’ list of Melito’s works in *HE* 4:26, *History of the Church*, 133, although few are extant. Also see Hall, *Melito*, xiii-xvii. In this essay all citations (Greek and English) of Melito’s work are from *Melito of Sardis*, ed. Hall. Additionally, see Stuart Hall, “Melito *Peri Pascha*: Corrections and Revisions,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 64 (2013): 105-110.

Binding of Isaac in Jewish tradition) was initially suggested by Robert Wilken, based on his study of *Fragments 9, 10 and 11*.⁵ Wilken observed that these fragments are "highly significant, because Melito is the first Christian writer to give more than passing notice to the sacrifice of Isaac."⁶ Wilken posited that Melito's awareness of Jewish exegeses on Genesis 22, led him to develop "his own interpretation [in] an attempt to rescue Isaac for the Christians."⁷ Following Wilken, notable scholars have concurred that Melito's *Fragments* seem cognizant of Jewish exegeses and offer a "polemical" response to Akedah tradition.⁸

Influenced by the archaeological work of A. Thomas Kraabel and his claim that "the present synagogue or its immediate predecessor, and the people who controlled it, made a profound and profoundly negative impression on [Melito],"⁹ several studies on Melito have related his writings to the social context of ancient Sardis.¹⁰ More recent scholarship has questioned the validity of Kraabel's approach and his conclusions regarding Melito's second-century social world¹¹ and offered new perspectives.¹² Nonetheless, Melito's attitude toward Judaism and his knowledge of Jewish tradition remains an intriguing topic.¹³ Some have observed

⁵ See Robert L. Wilken, "Melito, the Jewish Community at Sardis, and the Sacrifice of Isaac," *Theological Studies* 37 (1976): 53-69.

⁶ Wilken, "Melito," 58. The earliest Christian references to Abraham's offering of Isaac are in the New Testament (Jas 2:21 and Heb 11:17-19) as well as in *1 Clem 31.3* and *Ep. Barn. 7.3*. See Davies, "Martyrdom and Redemption: On the Development of Isaac Typology in the Early Church," *Studia Patristica* 17, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Oxford: Pergamon, 1982), 654.

⁷ Wilken, "Melito," 62.

⁸ P. R. Davies, "Martyrdom and Redemption," 656-657: "Melito relegates Isaac to the type of one redeemed by Christ . . . [it] could plausibly be interpreted as a polemical response to the Jewish assertion that Isaac's offering, although not completed through death, was, nonetheless, efficacious as an expiation for the sins of Israel." Edward Kessler, *Bound by the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 111, observes that Melito's interpretations indicate an encounter with Jewish exegesis, and "in his view, the 'battle' had . . . to be fought on 'Jewish soil.' He exhibits a two-fold approach to interpreting Genesis 22. Firstly, it overshadows the sacrifice of Christ and secondly, it is incomplete." See also Wilken, "Melito," 65-66; Lieu, *Image*, 226; and Robert Hayward, "The Sacrifice of Isaac and Jewish Polemic Against Christianity," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990): 304.

⁹ Andrew Seager and A.T. Kraabel, "The Synagogue and the Jewish Community," in *Sardis from Prehistoric Times: Results of the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis 1958-1975*, ed. George A. Hanfmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983), 187.

¹⁰ Andrew Michael Manis, "Melito of Sardis: Hermeneutic and Context," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32 (1987): 399. See also Wilken, "Melito," 53-56; and *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna*, ed. Richard S. Ascough (Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2005).

¹¹ See David Satran, "Anti-Jewish Polemic in the *Peri Pascha* of Melito of Sardis: The Problem of Social Context," in *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews*, ed. Ora Limor and Guy Stroumsa (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1996), 49-58.

¹² See M. P. Bonz, "The Jewish Community of Ancient Sardis: A Reassessment of its Rise to Prominence," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 93 (1990): 352, 356; and Jodi Magness, "The Date of the Sardis Synagogue in Light of the Numismatic Evidence," *American Journal of Archaeology* 109 (2005): 443-475.

¹³ Alistair Stewart Sykes, "Melito's Anti-Judaism," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5 (1997): 279, suggests that Melito may have been Jewish, and that his vituperation towards Judaism resembles a family argument. Lieu, *Image*, 232, remarks that as a Quartodeciman, vulnerable to the charge of Judaizing, Melito's polemic might be a distancing strategy, "implicitly making void any accusation of

resonances between *PP* with the Passover prescriptions in *Mishna Pesahim* 10:5 as well as with the *Passover Haggadah*.¹⁴ Furthermore, Melito's list of Old Testament books "largely conforms with what is widely agreed to be the 'Jewish canon' by this period, with the notable exception of Esther."¹⁵ Melito may have learned of Jewish tradition through contacts in Sardis,¹⁶ or during his travels to the Holy Land as the "first recorded pilgrim,"¹⁷ or through Jewish Christians who may have comprised part of his congregation. Reidar Aasgaard notes, "Melito's broad knowledge of the scriptures and Jewish tradition also suggests a close familiarity with the Jews and Judaism in his own social context."¹⁸

This study too accepts Melito's awareness of the Akedah tradition, but differs with those who claim that the *Fragments* express an antagonistic stance towards Jewish interpretations. It will probe the deeper significance of Akedah exegeses for Melito, suggesting that he turned to these Jewish traditions not primarily to express a defensive or contentious response, but instead as a means of developing his religious thought and articulating his soteriological ideas. This article posits that Melito's extensive use and re-vision of Akedah tradition in *Fragments 9, 10* and *11* bears implications for his theology and his attitude towards Judaism. The first part of this essay involves a brief review of the Akedah tradition, distinguishing some predominant features of ancient Jewish exegeses on Genesis 22 as pertinent for Melito's writings, and determining whether these exegetical strands existed in the second century C.E. The next section will include an analysis of the three fragments, individually and in relation to one another, with regard to the presence of Akedah tradition. Lastly, it will consider the ramifications of these findings. This article aims to demonstrate the extent of Melito's reliance on Jewish exegeses, as he draws on and revises their motifs, images and innovative interpretations of Genesis 22.

Methodologically, this essay will draw on insights derived from two approaches that elucidate Jewish Christian interactions in late antiquity. Daniel Boyarin presents a model of convergence and continuum to explain the dynamic between ancient Judaism and Christianity.¹⁹ In his study of martyrdom textual traditions, Boyarin refers to "border crossings" where "religious ideas and innovations can cross the borders in both directions," revealing "blurred boundaries between Judaism and Christianity. . ." ²⁰ Edward Kessler's exegetical approach re-

Judaizing." See also Reidar Aasgaard, "Among Gentiles, Jews and Christians: Formation of Christian Identity in Melito of Sardis" in *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna*, ed. Richard S. Ascough (Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2005), 156-174.

¹⁴ Stuart Hall, "Melito in the Light of the Passover Haggadah," *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971): 29-46; Also Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *The Lamb's High Feast: Melito, Peri Pascha and the Quartodeciman Paschal Liturgy at Sardis* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 61-66.

¹⁵ Lieu, *Image*, 207. *HE* 4:26, *History of the Church*, 135.

¹⁶ For example, Lieu, *Image*, 232, suggests that Quartodecimans like Melito may have depended on Jewish neighbors to determine the date for Pascha celebrations according to the Jewish Passover.

¹⁷ Lieu, *Image*, 207.

¹⁸ Aasgaard, "Among Gentiles," 159.

¹⁹ Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 8-21.

²⁰ Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 15, 19.

sembles Boyarin's in assuming that Jews and Christians shared textual interactions. Kessler argues that an exegetical relationship existed between Jewish and Christian commentators (on Genesis 22) reflecting mutual awareness, influence and encounter.²¹ An "exegetical encounter" is "a Jewish interpretation [which] either influenced, or was influenced by, a Christian interpretation and vice versa." It does not imply that Jewish and Christian exegetes met and engaged in debates, but rather, it indicates awareness of the exegetical tradition of the other, revealed in the interpretations.²² Both Boyarin's and Kessler's notions prove useful for exploring Melito's awareness of Akedah tradition, which will be considered next.

A. The Jewish Akedah Tradition

The word "Akedah" derives from the Hebrew root עקד ('kd) for "binding," a *hapax legomenon* which occurs in the Hebrew (Masoretic Text) of Genesis 22:9.²³ The Septuagint (LXX) employs the term συμποδίζω for the word "binding." Modern scholars use the term "Akedah" in various ways.²⁴ This article employs "Genesis 22" to refer to the biblical account, while using Akedah to refer to the context/event of Abraham's offering of Isaac. The terms "Akedah tradition" "notion" or "exegeses" will be applied to hermeneutical developments of the biblical story.

A brief outline of the Jewish Akedah tradition which Melito may have encountered is pertinent at this juncture. This study will focus on Jewish Akedah tradition since Christian (patristic) readings on Genesis 22 (emphasizing Christological ideas), though extensive, developed mostly after Melito's time.²⁵ Genesis 22's account of Abraham's offering his son in obedience to a divine command was already transformed by ancient Jewish exegetes, beginning in the second century B.C.E. "from a story about a young passive Isaac being sacrificed by Abraham to one in which Isaac becomes a willing, adult participant in his own slaughter."²⁶ Variations of the Genesis 22 story appear in numerous texts including Jubilees, 4Q225, Philo's *De Abrahamo* (*Abr.*), Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*

²¹ Kessler, *Bound*, 6-7, 182.

²² Kessler, *Bound*, 7-8. Kessler, 24-29, develops a set of criteria to indicate an exegetical encounter: an explicit reference to a source (i.e. an opposing view); use of the same scriptural quotation; use of the same literary form; reaching the same or opposite conclusions; use of a well-known controversial theme for Jews and Christians. It is also relevant to observe that while Origen refers to debates with Jewish counterparts (see N. R. M. De Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third Century Palestine* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976], 21-26) Melito does not mention such debates.

²³ The same verb is also used in the Mishna to refer to the binding of the Tamid (the daily lamb offering in the Temple) with a foreleg bound to a hind leg (*m. Tam.* 4.1).

²⁴ Joseph Fitzmyer, "The Sacrifice of Isaac in Qumran Literature," *Biblica* 83 (2002): 211.

²⁵ For sources, see Kessler, *Bound*; and *Unbinding the Binding of Isaac*, eds. Mishaël M. Caspi and John T. Greene (Maryland: University Press of America, 2007). Wilken, "Melito," 64, notes that the sacrifice of Isaac "played a minor role in early Christianity during the first 100-150 years...Melito is the most extensive early Christian commentator on the Akedah."

²⁶ Paul Flesher and Bruce Chilton, *The Targums: A Critical Introduction* (Brill: Leiden, 2011), 404, 405.

(JA), 4 Maccabees (4 Macc), Pseudo-Philo (*Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, *L.A.B.*) and the Pentateuchal Targums.²⁷ These texts contain innovative elements diverging from the original narrative in Genesis 22, including depicting: Abraham as a priest (Philo); Isaac's martyr-like behavior (4 Macc); the presence of multiple angels (Pentateuchal Targums); a Satan-like figure named Mastema instigating Abraham's trial (Jubilees and 4Q225); the Temple as the locus of sacrifice (Josephus); extended speeches by the protagonists (Targums and *L.A.B.*); as well as references to Isaac's blood (*L.A.B.*).²⁸

While many motifs appear in the Jewish Akedah tradition, I will focus here only on five features of their enhanced portrayal of Isaac,²⁹ which also bear relevance for Melito's *Fragments*.³⁰ These five features undergo significant shifts between early and later Jewish exegesis. Early Akedah traditions are defined here only as those texts unanimously accepted by scholars to be pre-70 C.E. in origin, such as Jubilees, 4Q225 and Philo (*Abr.* 32-36).³¹ Current critical consensus assigns others, like Josephus' Akedah (*JA* i. 222-236), *L.A.B.*, 4 Maccabees, and the Pentateuchal Targums, to post-70 C.E.³²

²⁷ The editions used are as follows: *The Book of Jubilees*, ed. J. VanderKam (Louvain: Peeters, 1989); *Qumran Cave 4, VIII: Parabiblical Texts, Part I*, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert XIII, eds. J.T. Milik and J. VanderKam (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); *Philo*, eds. F. Colson and G. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1929-1943); *Josephus*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray et al., Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1925-1965); 4 Maccabees, *BGT BibleWorks on CD-ROM*, Version 6.0 (Virginia: BibleWorks LLC, 2003); Pseudo-Philo, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo*, ed. M. R. James (New York: Ktav Publishing Company, 1971); the Targum translations are my own (see Paba Nidhani De Andrado, *Akedah Servant Complex: The Soteriological Linkage of Genesis 22 and Isaiah 53 in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Writings* [Leuven: Peeters, 2013], Appendix III).

²⁸ For studies of these traditions, see James Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac: A Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Light of Aqedah* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981); Flesher and Chilton, *Targums*, ch. 20, "Genesis 22 in the Targumim and in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation"; Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar, eds., *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and its Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Leroy Andrew Huizenga, *The New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

²⁹ I adopt this approach from De Andrado, *Akedah Servant Complex*, 187-231.

³⁰ Note that *Fragment 11* does not mention Isaac, although its context is obviously Akedah.

³¹ Jubilees is dated between 160-150 B.C.E. See VanderKam, *Book of Jubilees* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 21. 4Q225 has been palaeographically dated between 30 B.C.E.-20 C.E.; see Milik and VanderKam, *Qumran Cave 4*, 141-155. Philo's *De Abrahamo*'s date is unknown, but would fit within his life span (ca. 15 B.C.E. to 45 C.E.); see Daniel Schwartz, "Philo, His Family, and His Times," in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. Adam Kamesar (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9-31.

³² Louis Feldman, "Josephus as a Biblical Interpreter: 'The Aqedah'," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 75 (1985): 252, states that "Josephus spent at least a dozen years (79/81-93/94 CE) writing the *Antiquities*"; Fitzmyer, "Sacrifice," 224, suggests 70-100 C.E. for *L.A.B.*; Van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 82, assigns ca.100 CE for 4 Macc. Precise dating of the Pentateuchal Targums is difficult, but current scholarship concurs with "a chronological range for all the Targums of approximately four centuries, with the initial composition of Targum Onqelos coming at the beginning of that period, by the middle of the second century, and Targum Pseudo- Jonathan coming toward the end...The origins of the Palestinian Targums [including Targum Neofiti, and Fragment Targums] lie somewhere in the centuries in between" (Flesher and Chilton, *Targums*, 166).

The first feature: In Genesis 22 and early texts like Jubilees (17:15-18:19), Isaac remains unaware of his impending sacrifice, while in later texts (Josephus and *L.A.B.*) Isaac is informed of it explicitly. In *L.A.B.*'s "Hymn of Deborah" (32:2), Abraham states outright, "My son, I am offering you as a burnt offering." Likewise in Josephus, Abraham briefs Isaac that "it was by God's will that I became thy [father], and now again as pleases Him I am resigning thee." He advises his son to "quit thou now this life not by the common road, but sped by thine own father, on the way to God, the Father of all, through the rites of sacrifice" (*JA* i. 228-230).

Second, Isaac consents to becoming a sacrificial offering only in later Akedah writings, but not in Genesis 22 or Philo's *Abr.* (32-36) where he is passive and voiceless.³³ In Josephus, after Isaac's father informed him of his coming sacrifice, he "received these words with joy" and "he rushed to the altar" (*JA* i. 232). Similarly, 4 Macc, possibly influenced by martyrdom concepts, states, "Isaac for the sake of religion yielded himself to be slaughtered" (13:12).³⁴

Third, Isaac gains status. In Genesis 22, Isaac's role is minimal compared with Abraham's. However, in later Akedah traditions, Isaac gives an eloquent speech (*L.A.B.* 32:3), or is granted a heavenly vision while on the altar (v.10 in *Tg. Neof., Frg. Tg.*). Calling the event *Akedat Yizhak* (v.14 in *Tg. Neof., Frg. Tg.*) emphasizes Isaac's centrality.

Fourth: the Temple Mount is the explicit locus of Isaac's Akedah. The Hebrew of Genesis 22:2 identifies the place as Moriah which the LXX translates τὴν γῆν τὴν ὑψηλὴν (the high land). Later Akedah traditions are more explicit, as Jubilees 18:13 refers to Mt. Zion; Josephus calls it "the place where King David built the temple," (*JA* i. 227), while the Targums mention the "Sanctuary of the Lord" (v. 14 in *Tg. Neof.*).

Fifth: Isaac is linked to an expiatory or redemptive role, associated with suffering or the shedding of blood. These details have no foundation in the biblical account, in which the ram is substituted for Isaac. However, *L.A.B.*'s "Balaam" refers to Isaac's blood, in spite of the fact that he was not slain, saying, "... on account of his blood I chose [the people of Israel]" (18:5). Its "Hymn of Deborah" stresses Isaac's sense of his expiatory role: "Have I not been born into the world to be offered as a sacrifice to him who made me...and through me peoples will understand that the Lord has made the soul of a man worthy to be a sacrifice" (32:3). This notion is most developed in the Pentateuchal Targums where Abraham prays for his descendants, asking that "when the sons of Isaac enter into their hour of groaning, remember the binding of Isaac their father and release and forgive their guilt" (*Frg. Tg.* 14). While the martyrdom text of 4 Macc does not

³³However, 4Q225, an early Qumran fragment, contains a few features (like a willing Isaac) found in later Targums. See G. Vermes, "New Light on the Sacrifice of Isaac from 4Q Pseudo-Jubilees" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 47 (1996): 140-146, and Fitzmyer, "Sacrifice of Isaac," 218, 222.

³⁴See Kessler, *Bound*, 105.

depict Isaac in an expiatory role, nevertheless, it associates the Akedah with suffering, since Isaac serves as “the supreme example of the martyr.”³⁵

The crucial question is: which Akedah texts can be securely dated prior to Melito? Melito’s major work *PP* is dated between 160-170 C.E.³⁶ Melito’s *Fragments* 9, 10, and 11, which resemble *PP* in style,³⁷ are best dated between 155 B.C.E. to 175 C.E. While scholars like Wilken, Davies, Hayward, Kessler and Lieu agree about Melito’s plausible awareness of Jewish Akedah exegeses (see n. 8), they disagree on which strands existed during Melito’s time, pointing to the challenge of dating the various Jewish sources. Wilken suggests that the Targums best capture “the Jewish view of the Akedah” during Melito’s time.³⁸ However, as mentioned (see n. 32) recent scholars propose a later composition period for the Pentateuchal Targums.³⁹ Notwithstanding that they may contain some earlier traditions, the targumic texts themselves post-date Melito’s writings. Omitting the Targums as evidence for second-century Akedah traditions seems safest. More credible witnesses are early Akedah traditions in Jubilees, 4Q225 and Philo (see n. 31). Later Akedah interpretations in Josephus, *L.A.B.* and 4 Macc are also reliably assigned to the first or early second century C.E (see n. 32). This leaves *L.A.B.* bearing witness to an expiatory role for Isaac in this group, with suggested dates ranging from 70-150 C.E.⁴⁰ Given this context, we may confidently state that the selected five features pertaining to Isaac in (early and late) Jewish exegeses were part of second-century Akedah traditions.

Granted that these Jewish exegetical motifs existed during Melito’s time, can we presume their availability to him? As an erudite Greek speaker, Melito’s access to Greek compositions preceding 150 C.E. (like Philo, Josephus and 4 Macc) may reasonably be allowed.⁴¹ Additionally, Jewish exegeses composed in other languages could have been accessible to a Greek reader. Textual evidence indicates that works like Jubilees and *L.A.B.*, originally composed in Hebrew, were translated early into different languages, including Greek.⁴² Such Akedah notions may have been in circulation and available, if not directly, then through intermediary texts. Recent scholarship has stressed the significance of inter-textual dialogue within the Akedah tradition; later texts interacted with the motifs of earlier texts, regardless of provenance or language.⁴³ For example, a Hellenistic

³⁵ See Robert Hayward, “The Present State of Research into the Targumic Account of the Sacrifice of Isaac,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 32 (1981): 130.

³⁶ Hall, *Melito*, xxii.

³⁷ Hall, *Melito*, xxxii.

³⁸ Wilken, “Melito,” 59.

³⁹ Phillip Alexander, “Targum, Targumim.” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), VI: 302; Kessler, *Bound*, 35.

⁴⁰ Kessler, *Bound*, 23; Fitzmyer, “Sacrifice,” 224.

⁴¹ Melito’s writings display his classical education. See Frankie J. Melton Jr, “Preaching and Melito’s Use of Greco-Roman Rhetoric,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167 (2010): 460-80.

⁴² Daniel J. Harrington, “The Original Language of Pseudo-Philo’s ‘Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum,’” *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970): 503-514. On Jubilees, see J. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Louvain: Peeters, 1989), v-xxxiv.

⁴³ See De Andrado, *Akedah Servant Complex*.

Jewish writer with bilingual facility like Josephus (who descended from priestly lineage and was educated in Jerusalem) included notions derived from Jewish tradition in his work.⁴⁴ In theory then, Melito had access to these five features in Jewish exegeses about Isaac, whether of Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic origin, either directly through Greek texts or translations, or through intermediary texts.

B. Melito's Fragments and the Akedah Tradition

Scholarship on Melito's biblical usage has mostly focused on *PP*, but his *Fragments* too reveal his use of biblical texts and traditions, including the Jewish exegesis about Isaac.⁴⁵ Melito's *Fragments 9, 10, and 11* are preserved in a number of manuscripts of a catena on Genesis.⁴⁶ They are generally considered authentic,⁴⁷ but their original context is unknown.⁴⁸ All three fragments refer to Genesis 22 and "[draw] parallels between the story of Isaac in Genesis 22 and the death of Jesus, under the influence...of [Isaiah] 53."⁴⁹ Shared biblical references and the mutual theme of sacrifice link the three fragments, but each offers a particular perspective. *Fragment 9* compares and contrasts the offering of Isaac and the sacrifice of Christ. *Fragment 10* concerns the ram's ransoming of Isaac which parallels Christ's redemption of humanity, and *Fragment 11* interprets the Akedah scene of the ram caught in a Sabek tree in relation to Christ's crucifixion.

In what follows, I assess Melito's use of the Akedah tradition in these *Fragments*, paying attention to his deviations from the original biblical narrative, analyzing how these align, positively or negatively, with known Jewish exegeses (cf. Kessler's criteria, n. 22). Such textual loci may be considered sites of exegetical encounters and will provide insights into Melito's non-polemical knowledge of Jewish traditions.

Melito's *Fragment 9*, the longest of the three, consists of twenty-five lines, and draws correspondences between the offering of Isaac and Christ's sacrifice. Each figure carries wood: "and he carried the wood on his shoulders" / καὶ ἐβάστασε τὸ ξύλον ἐπὶ τοῖς ὤμοις αὐτοῦ (7). Each is led up to be slain by his father (8, 14). However, the characters also differ, in that Christ suffers whereas Isaac does not suffer (9). *Fragment 9* further describes Isaac as silent, that he was not "frightened by the sword, nor alarmed at the fire, nor sorrowful at the suffer-

⁴⁴ Louis Feldman, "Josephus," *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), III: 986.

⁴⁵ On Melito's biblical background see H. Knapp's useful study, "Melito's Use of Scripture in *Peri Pascha*: Second-century Typology" *Vigiliae Christianae* 54 (2000): 343-374. Melito's wide-ranging biblical references in *PP* include primarily the Exodus Passover narrative, as well as Genesis, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Psalms and the New Testament. Regarding his scriptural sources, Hall, *Melito*, xl, states that Melito's quotations usually agree with the LXX or one of its principal manuscripts. However, Lynn Cohick, *The Peri Pascha Attributed to Melito of Sardis: Setting, Purpose, and Sources* (Providence: Brown University, 2000), 147, suggests that Melito used derivative biblical sources.

⁴⁶ Hall, *Melito*, xxxiii.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, xxxii.

⁴⁸ Wilken, "Melito," 58.

⁴⁹ Lieu, *Image*, 77.

ing, and he carried with fortitude the model of the Lord”/ Τὸ γὰρ ξίφος οὐ φοβηθεῖς, οὐδὲ τὸ πῦρ πτοηθεῖς, οὐδὲ τὸ παθεῖν λυπηθεῖς, ἐβάστασεν καρτερῶν τὸν τύπον τοῦ κυρίου (19-22). Thrice Melito uses the word τύπος (10, 11, 22) to clarify the relationship between the two: Isaac is the model in contrast to Christ who is the fulfilment.

Here, one striking departure from the biblical text is Melito’s emphatic statement, “Isaac did not suffer” / Ἰσαὰκ δὲ οὐκ ἔπαθεν (9). Kessler observes, “...the biblical text provides no indication that Isaac suffered or shed blood. Consequently, there was no reason why [patristic writers] should consider whether Isaac suffered or not, unless they were aware of contemporary Jewish exegesis.”⁵⁰ Melito could have been responding to Akedah interpretations which suggest that Isaac’s blood was shed and that he played an expiatory role (*L.A.B.* 18, 32) or to exegesis that associates Isaac with suffering martyrs (4 Macc). Melito not only refutes these notions about Isaac, but he insists that “Christ suffered, whereas Isaac did not suffer” / ἀλλὰ Χριστὸς ἔπαθεν, Ἰσαὰκ δὲ οὐκ ἔπαθεν (9). He accentuates the greater role played by Christ in contrast to Isaac, who as a model, did not experience the actual trauma. Since Isaac did not suffer, we can infer that his sacrifice did not take place, whereas Christ endured the pain of being offered, and his sacrifice was accomplished. It could be argued that Melito is unaware of Jewish interpretations here and instead invents a typological contrast (i.e. Isaac does not accomplish what the fulfilment, Christ, does by suffering). However, as Hayward notes, “the tradition that Isaac suffered is strongly represented in 4 Maccabees which presents him as the model of a martyr for the Jewish faith...it would not seem unlikely, then, that Melito is flatly contradicting [it].”⁵¹ Melito’s statement that “Isaac did not suffer” appears to be a specific response to a well-known Jewish interpretation.

Melito also claims that Isaac was not “sorrowful at the suffering” / οὐδὲ τὸ παθεῖν λυπηθεῖς (21). This alludes to Isaac’s foreknowledge of his impending sacrifice and suffering, but suggests that he remained willing. Wilken too comments that “Melito makes quite clear that Isaac knew what was to happen.”⁵² The notion of Isaac’s prior knowledge and implied consent does not arise from Genesis 22. Instead, Melito presumably derives this idea from the Akedah tradition (as found in Josephus) where Isaac is informed that he is to be sacrificed and he consents. Although *Fragment 9* does not state that Isaac is explicitly told, it suggests Isaac’s awareness and readiness to be sacrificed, pointing to Christ’s preparedness as well, since Isaac’s fortitude is a model for the Lord (22).

Additionally, *Fragment 9* depicts a martyr-like, unflinching Isaac who is “not frightened by the sword, nor alarmed at the fire” / Τὸ γὰρ ξίφος οὐ φοβηθεῖς, οὐδὲ τὸ πῦρ πτοηθεῖς (19-20). Since the biblical account does not refer to Isaac’s emotions, Melito’s stoical portrayal seems indebted to the Akedah tradition (as in Josephus and 4 Macc). For example, 4 Macc 16:20 states, “When Isaac saw his

⁵⁰ Kessler, *Bound*, 130-131.

⁵¹ Hayward, “Sacrifice of Isaac,” 304.

⁵² Wilken, “Melito,” 64.

father's hand wielding a sword and descending upon him, he did not cower" and also refers to "the father by whose hand Isaac would have submitted to being slain" (13:12). The latter image also resonates with Melito's reference to "Abraham [who] stood by and held the sword unsheathed, not ashamed to put to death his son" / καὶ Ἀβραὰμ παρεστὼς καὶ κρατῶν γυμνὸν τὸ ξίφος, οὐκ αἰδούμενος φονεῦσαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ (24-25). By highlighting the fearlessness of Isaac in the face of his father's action, Melito intimates Christ's own courage in being offered by God, since Isaac both parallels and points to Christ.

Melito's insistence that Isaac was silent, "not opening his mouth nor uttering a sound" / οὐκ ἀνοίγων τὸ στόμα, οὐδὲ φεγγόμενος φωνῆ (18), seems to respond to Isaac's eloquence in the Akedah tradition.⁵³ Melito could be counteracting the later Jewish portrayal of a dominant Isaac who voices his views (as in Josephus) by choosing instead Isaac's biblical subordinate, passive position, perhaps because this silence is appropriate to the image of the martyr who complies without resistance, thus foreshadowing Christ's own martyr-like, unprotesting yielding to his suffering.

Lending credibility to Melito's awareness of Jewish exegeses is *Fragment 9*'s employment of the verb συμποδίσας (15) which is the LXX translation of the Hebrew *hapax legomenon*, 'kd in Gen 22:9. Melito uses the verb just once, only in reference to the act of Abraham's binding Isaac. Although Melito mentions the idea of being "bound" elsewhere in relation to Christ, the ram, and Isaac,⁵⁴ in these discussions he does not employ συμποδίζω but other verbs like δέω. As Cohick notes, "Frag[ment] 10 [employs] *desmōn/detheis* twice in speaking about Jesus as the ram that saved Isaac."⁵⁵ Kessler notes that "this usage [συμποδίζω] is extremely rare in the writings of the church fathers." Such a specific use of the term suggests that Melito knows "the Akedah by its rabbinic title, the Binding of Isaac."⁵⁶ It is unlikely that Melito is merely following LXX terminology here, because his text freely deviates from Genesis 22.⁵⁷ Melito's choice of the rare συμποδίζω in *Fragment 9* appears deliberate, reflecting awareness of the term's resonance within Jewish tradition.

In *Fragment 9*, then, Melito seems to manifest familiarity with Jewish exegeses on Genesis 22, and the many ideas which Melito probably derived from it shaped his Christian exegeses. He responds to these Jewish ideas either by denial (that Isaac suffered or voiced his views) or by affirmation (of Isaac's fortitude, his prior knowledge, or his compliance and readiness to be sacrificed). Additionally, Melito presents Isaac and his sacrifice as a model for Christ's sacrifice. Like Isaac, Christ was offered by his father, and he was aware of and prepared for the

⁵³ Hayward, "Sacrifice of Isaac," 304.

⁵⁴ As in *Fragment 9* (2, 17, 23) and *Fragment 10* (3, 6).

⁵⁵ Cohick, *Peri Pascha Attributed to Melito*, 45.

⁵⁶ Kessler, *Bound*, 131.

⁵⁷ Melito omits many details of Genesis 22 (LXX / MT) such as God's initial command and testing of Abraham, his preparations, taking along two servants, and angelic intervention. Melito also does not use distinctive LXX phrases such as the reference to "your beloved son" / τὸν υἱὸν σου ἀγαπητόν (Gen 22:2) and "the high land" / τὴν γῆν τὴν ὑψηλὴν (Gen 22:2).

sacrifice. However, he possessed in fullness the martyr's qualities that Isaac only modeled (courage, willingness, compliant silence, fortitude), he suffered, and his sacrifice was complete. It is reasonable to infer that Melito's reliance on and response to Jewish exegetical notions led him to develop this theme of Christ's sacrificial character.

Melito's *Fragment 10*, consisting of only seven lines, pertains to the Akedah tradition as well. Melito mentions Isaac thrice (2, 3, 4) but clearly emphasizes the ram (Genesis 22:13). He highlights its redemptive role, describing that "On behalf of Isaac the righteous one, a ram appeared for slaughter, so that Isaac might be released from bonds" / Ὑπὲρ Ἰσαὰκ τοῦ δικαίου ἐφάνη κριὸς εἰς σφαγὴν, ἵνα δεσμῶν Ἰσαὰκ λυθῆ, (2-3). Moreover, Melito sets up a parallel between the ram which is slaughtered to ransom Isaac, and the Lord who dies to ransom humanity: "That ram, slain, ransomed Isaac, so also the Lord, slain, saved us" / ἐκεῖνος σφαγεῖς ἐλυτρώσατο τὸν Ἰσαὰκ, οὕτως καὶ ὁ κύριος σφαγεῖς ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς, (4-5). Both the ram and the Lord are sacrificed, and both their sacrifices have salvific effect. Moreover, the emphatic words "so also the Lord" / οὕτως καὶ ὁ κύριος (5) convey that Melito is not simply making a comparison, but articulating that the ram serves as a model of Christ.

Intriguingly, Melito's stress on the ransoming death of the ram is not consonant with the biblical account. There, Isaac's salvation occurs when the Angel of the Lord intervenes and halts his sacrifice (22:12), not with the subsequent sacrifice of the ram. This contrasts with Philo's solution to this problem. He dispenses with the ram entirely and has the Lord directly save Isaac (*De Abrahamo* 176). Why then does Melito give the ram prominence, comparing it to Christ, and accentuating that it ransomed Isaac?

Melito could be responding to Jewish exegeses that assign Isaac an elevated status, associating him with redemptive effects. For example, in *L.A.B.* 32:3, Isaac makes a sacrificial declaration: "my blessedness will be above that of all men." Pointing to the presence of the theme in later Church Fathers, Kessler suggests, Melito may have been contradicting this soteriological role by demonstrating that Isaac himself needed saving.⁵⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, writing two centuries after Melito, makes this point explicitly:

Abraham saw the Messiah in the ram, which was offered up instead as a sacrifice to God...[Abraham] was restrained from laying his hand on the lad [Isaac] lest the Jews, taking occasion from the sacrifice of Isaac, should reject the prophetic declarations concerning our Saviour...and should refer all such things as these to the son of Abraham.

(*Epist. 6: Patrologia graeca* 26, 1387 8).

Did Melito also feel that the Akedah tradition's elevation of Isaac would detract from the recognition due to Christ?

⁵⁸ Kessler, *Bound*, 141-142, notes that comparisons between the ram and Christ were common among later church fathers like Origen, Cyril of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nyssa.

Fragment 10 does intimate Melito's cognizance of Jewish exegeses that give emphasis to the ram.⁵⁹ In some Akedah accounts, the ram's importance depends on its association with Isaac, with the ram representing rather than redeeming Isaac.⁶⁰ For instance, *Genesis Rabbah* 56:9 depicts Abraham as requesting God to "regard the blood of this ram as though it were the blood of Isaac, my son."⁶¹ Admittedly, *Genesis Rabbah* is a later work, but its midrashic exegeses includes earlier materials.⁶² If Melito was aware of such Jewish perspectives identifying the ram with Isaac, *Fragment 10* may be an attempt to disassociate them and to accentuate instead the ram's correspondence to Christ.

Overall, *Fragment 10* indicates Melito's awareness of the Akedah tradition. His distinctive depiction of the ram reinterprets the biblical account and gives the animal greater prominence, presumably in response to Jewish exegeses. By describing the ram's function as ransoming Isaac, Melito tacitly negates any soteriological role for Isaac, and also disrupts the identification between Isaac and the ram. Since the latter performs a redemptive act, Melito draws parallels between the ram and Christ, suggesting that the ram was merely a model of Christ. Such correspondences enable Melito to highlight the soteriological effect of Christ's sacrifice: "the Lord, slain, saved us, and bound, released us, and sacrificed, ransomed us" / ὁ κύριος σφαγείς ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς, καὶ δεθείς ἔλυσε, καὶ τυθείς ἐλυτρώσατο (5-7). The verbs "save," "release," "ransom" and "sacrifice" accentuate the redemptive action of Christ. Moreover, Melito stresses the scope of Christ's salvific work. While Isaac cannot save anyone, not even himself, and requires ransoming by the ram, the ram too is able to save only one person, Isaac. Christ, in contrast, has saving ramifications for "us" / ἡμᾶς, meaning all humanity. In *Fragment 10*, Melito's apparent response to Jewish exegeses enables him to advance his perspectives on the scope and salvific efficacy of Christ's sacrifice.

Melito's *Fragment 11*, consisting of six lines, is the briefest of the three fragments. It lacks explicit mention of Isaac, but it shares the Akedah context. This fragment includes a reference to the ram: "For the Lord was a lamb like the ram" / Ἦν γὰρ ὁ κύριος ὁ ἄμνος ὡς ὁ κριός (2). The text also refers to the scene in Gen 22:13 (LXX) where the ram is caught in a Sabek tree. Melito interprets that the ram/lamb points to Christ: "But the tree displayed the Cross, and that place, Jerusalem, and the lamb, the Lord fettered for slaughter" / ἀλλὰ τὸ φυτὸν ἀπέφαινε τὸν σταυρόν, καὶ ὁ τόπος ἐκεῖνος τὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ, καὶ ὁ ἄμνος τὸν κύριον ἐμπεποδισμένον εἰς σφαγὴν (4-6). The word Sabek (Σαβέκ) in the LXX (while likely a transliteration of the Hebrew שֶׁבַע) could also be a word play on the Aramaic ܫܒܥ connoting the idea of forgiveness.⁶³ The images cohere since Mt.

⁵⁹ See Kessler, *Bound*, ch. 6, "The Sacrifice of the Ram."

⁶⁰ Kessler, *Bound*, 144.

⁶¹ *Genesis Rabbah* is dated to 5th c. CE, but Kessler, *Bound*, 144, notes that this interpretation (Gen. Rab. 56:9) is based upon the (early) Mishnaic concept (*m. Tem.* 5.5) of exchange known as תּוּבָא ("instead of") which validated the substitution of one item for another.

⁶² Moshe David Herr and Stephen G. Wald, "Genesis Rabbah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2007), 7:448-49.

⁶³ This connection is made explicit in *Fragment 12* which, however, is not an authentic Melito text (See Hall Melito, xxxiii). See also Wilken, "Melito," 67.

Moriah is the original setting of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:2, Masoretic Text version) which site has been identified with the Jerusalem Temple in Chronicles (2 Chronicles 3:1), as well as in *Jubilees* and Josephus.

The locus of Isaac's sacrifice is important in the Akedah tradition, perhaps to "prove the sole legitimacy of Jerusalem and its temple as the place of sacrifice."⁶⁴ Melito seems aware of this notion in *Fragment 11* which identifies Jerusalem (and intrinsically the Temple) as the setting of the sacrifice. However, as Wilken points out, Melito redefines Jerusalem as important because it is the locus where the crucifixion occurred (in "that place, Jerusalem").⁶⁵ By juxtaposing these two events and stating that "the tree displayed the cross"/ τὸ φυτόν ἀπέφαινε τὸν σταυρόν (4), *Fragment 11* presents the Akedah as a prefiguration of the crucifixion.

Fragment 11 also draws a comparison between cultic animals (i.e. the ram and/or lamb) and the Lord "fettered for the slaughter" (6). This correspondence conveys the idea that the Temple cult (as evoked by sacrificial animals) is fulfilled by Christ's sacrifice, a point which Melito overtly declares in *PP* (44): "the blood of the sheep was precious but it is worthless now because of the Spirit of the Lord, a speechless lamb was precious, but it worthless now because of the spotless Son, the temple below was precious but it is worthless now because of the Christ above."

C. Summary of Findings

As Kessler demonstrates in his comprehensive study on Akedah exegetical encounters in the first six centuries, "a close exegetical relationship [exists] between Jewish and Christian biblical interpretations" and "neither Jewish nor Christian interpretations can be understood properly without reference to the other...it is no longer acceptable to study these subjects in a vacuum."⁶⁶ This analysis of *Fragments 9, 10* and *11* reveals cogent evidence that Melito was aware of Jewish exegeses of Genesis 22, including key motifs concerning the figures of Isaac and the ram, and the location of the Akedah. The counter-argument that Melito independently presented his own interpretation of Genesis 22, discovering contrasts and types based on his own biblical reading does not bear weight. As Kessler observes, *Fragment 9* is one of the earliest and most significant patristic interpretations of the Akedah, "indicating an awareness of the increasing emphasis on Isaac in the earlier post-biblical and rabbinic interpretations."⁶⁷ Other scholars, like Wilken and Hayward, similarly confirm the likelihood of Melito's knowledge of Akedah tradition.

This analysis demonstrates that Melito not only received the Akedah tradition but he also responded to it by adapting, affirming, interpreting, or redefining its concepts. In *Fragment 9*, Melito's depiction seems to counter Jewish exegeses

⁶⁴ Hayward, "Present State," 133.

⁶⁵ Wilken, "Melito," 67.

⁶⁶ Kessler, *Bound*, 182.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 110

that Isaac suffered, played a redemptive role, or made eloquent speeches, but affirm the Akedah tradition's notions about Isaac's martyr-like courage, willingness, and prior knowledge of the sacrifice. Melito redefines Isaac's status by depicting him as a "model," highlighting correspondences between Isaac and Christ. In doing so, Melito presents a sacrificial portrait of Christ as one who suffered and whose sacrifice was complete, unlike that of Isaac. *Fragment 10* too reveals engagement with the Akedah tradition, but with a focus on the ram. In elevating the ram, Melito appears to address Jewish exegeses that assign Isaac an expiatory role or depict the ram as representing Isaac. Melito reinterprets the ram's function: it ransoms Isaac by being slaughtered in his place. Through comparisons between the ram and the Lord, Melito intimates that in this, the ram is a model of Christ who dies to redeem all humanity. This magnifies the greater scope of Christ's saving work. In addition, *Fragment 11* suggests Melito's awareness of Jewish exegeses that accentuate the setting of Akedah as the Jerusalem Temple. While Melito does not negate this tradition, nevertheless he redefines the importance of Jerusalem as the site of Christ's crucifixion and conveys that the Akedah event is a pre-figuration of Christ's sacrifice. Melito also refers to cultic animals, implying that Christ's death on the cross fulfills the role of Jewish Temple sacrifice.

Clearly, in each of the three *Fragments*, Melito offers distinctive interpretations of a (Hebrew Bible) figure or scene. In doing so, he deviates from Genesis' account, apparently drawing on Jewish exegeses from which he derives and reshapes notions. In this, Melito employs a typological hermeneutic, explicitly or implicitly depicting the figure or scene as a model or pre-figuration [τύπος] which finds fulfillment in Christ.⁶⁸ Melito's primary emphasis is neither on diminishing these figures (though it is a partial effect) nor in advocating a radical supersessionism. Rather, by generating correspondences or contrasts between the "models" and Christ, Melito strives to develop a sacrificial portrait of Christ.

D. Theological Implications

Although they do not coherently define his views, Melito's writings bear theological implications. Even in *PP*, his major work, Melito's preaching communicates his theology in an apparently "haggadic way," rather than in a systematic, orderly manner.⁶⁹ In spite of this, soteriology does emerge both in *PP*⁷⁰ and the *Fragments* as a major concern. Through their integration of the Akedah tradition, each of the selected fragments in varied but related ways expresses the theme of Christ's atoning sacrifice. *Fragment 9* stresses that Christ's suffering signals the completeness of his sacrifice in contrast to Isaac's. *Fragment 10* high-

⁶⁸ Manis, "Melito of Sardis," 397, indicates that "the exegetical principles underlying Melito's typological hermeneutic are most clearly set forth in two sections of the *Paschal Homily*: PH 35-45 and 57-58."

⁶⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, "Dramatic Proclamation of the Gospel: Homily on the Passion by Melito of Sardis," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 37 (1992): 153.

⁷⁰ See Torrance, "Dramatic Proclamation," 155-159.

lights the scope of Christ's sacrifice, with its redemptive efficacy extending to all humanity, like and unlike that of the ram who just saves Isaac. *Fragment 11* emphasizes that Christ's crucifixion was in Jerusalem, prefigured by the Akedah, as the fulfilment of Temple sacrifice.

In these *Fragments*, Melito predicates his soteriology on the biblical cult, especially its sacrificial complex. Although Melito does not explicitly mention the sacrificial system, he evokes it through Akedah images and motifs, drawing on the Jewish tradition that links Mt. Moriah and the Jerusalem Temple Mount. His references to the act of binding (*Fragment 9*), the sword readied for slaughter (*Fragment 9*), sacrificial animals like the ram and the lamb (*Fragment 10*), and his emphasis on Jerusalem (*Fragment 11*), all resonate with the ancient cult, where ritual slaughter and blood manipulation of sacrificial offerings resulted in the atonement of sins, among other functions. Melito also presents the Akedah image of "a son led by his father to a mountain for slaughter" (*Fragment 9*) as congruent with the expiatory notion of God offering the Son as atonement for all (cf. John 3:16). His references to the Lord carrying wood on his shoulders like Isaac (*Fragment 9*) and his image of the Lord fettered for slaughter like a lamb (*Fragment 11*) reinforce the notion of Christ's crucifixion as an expiatory sacrifice. Clearly, Akedah associations enable Melito to effectively convey the soteriological and sacrificial role of Christ.

While scholars have examined the Akedah imagery in the *Fragments*, few have commented on the significance of Melito's use of Isaiah 53 in these texts, especially Isa 53:7.⁷¹ Intriguingly, words from Genesis 22 and Isaiah 53 blend at a semantic and lexical level. Melito invokes this in the opening sentence of *Fragment 9*: "For as a ram he was bound...and as a lamb he was shorn, and as a sheep he was led to slaughter, and as a lamb he was crucified" / Ὡς γὰρ κριὸς ἐδέθη, . . . καὶ ὡς ἄμνος ἐκάρη, καὶ ὡς πρόβατον εἰς σφαγὴν ἤχθη, καὶ ὡς ἄμνος ἐσταυρώθη (2-6). The phrase, "For as a ram he was bound" / Ὡς γὰρ κριὸς ἐδέθη clearly alludes to Gen 22:13; "as a lamb he was shorn, and as a sheep he was led to slaughter, and as a lamb crucified" / ὡς ἄμνος ἐκάρη, καὶ ὡς πρόβατον εἰς σφαγὴν ἤχθη, καὶ ὡς ἄμνος ἐσταυρώθη (4-6) refers to Isa 53:7. Both the Akedah's "bound ram" and the Isaianic "lamb led to slaughter" describe cultic animals readied for sacrifice, thus heightening the sacrificial dimension of Christ who was "crucified like a lamb" / ὡς ἄμνος ἐσταυρώθη (6). *Fragment 10* again fuses the two texts in the phrase that "a ram appeared for slaughter" / εφάνη κριὸς εἰς σφαγὴν (2) on behalf of Isaac. Although the ram reference is from Gen 22, the phrase for slaughter / εἰς σφαγὴν is likely an allusion to Isa 53:7 (albeit a variant of the LXX form ἐπι σφαγὴν).⁷² Melito's merging of Genesis 22 and Isaiah 53 connotes the idea of vicarious sacrifice, for the ram is slain on behalf (ὑπὲρ) of Isaac, as Christ dies on behalf of others. *Fragment 11* displays another association of the Isaianic lamb and the Akedah ram by stating: "For the Lord was a lamb

⁷¹ De Andrado, *Akedah Servant Complex*, 220, 222.

⁷² Lieu, *Image*, 225, notes of *Fragment 9* that the ram "which actually was slaughtered provides a potent symbol, allowing a certain elision with the sheep of Isa 53:7, led to the slaughter.

like a ram / Ἦν γὰρ ὁ κύριος ὁ ἄμνός ὡς ὁ κριός, (2). Further, it too links the Lord to the lamb in the phrase "and the Lamb, the Lord fettered for slaughter" / καὶ ὁ ἄμνός τὸν κύριον ἐμπεποδισμένον εἰς σφαγὴν (6) with "fettered for slaughter" / εἰς σφαγὴν again signaling Melito's allusion to the lamb in Isa 53:7. These images of cultic animals in the locus of Jerusalem emphasize the sacrificial elements of Christ's death.

In summary, Melito employs a range of cultic motifs and sacrificial notions drawn from Genesis 22, the Akedah tradition, and Isaiah 53; these enable him to express his soteriology in *Fragments 9, 10 and 11*. Associations with the figure of Isaac, animal offerings like the ram/lamb, and the Temple locus, all heighten his argument for Christ's death on the cross as an atoning sacrifice. While each fragment emphasizes a different facet of Christ's sacrifice, they all share a common basis in interpretations of the biblical cult, providing the context and meaning for Melito's soteriology.

E. Conclusion

Building upon previous scholarship, this article has examined Melito's engagement with the Akedah tradition in his *Fragments 9, 10, and 11*. After identifying five relevant features in the ancient Jewish exegesis of Genesis 22 and its portrayal of Isaac, the article's analysis reveals Melito's extensive use of Akedah tradition in these three *Fragments*. This study thus demonstrates that Melito not only received Jewish exegeses, but that he engaged in "re-vision" as he adapted, redefined, affirmed or re-interpreted the Akedah notions about Isaac, the ram and the Akedah site. Each *Fragment* offers a distinctive interpretation of a biblical figure or scene, employing a typological hermeneutic and drawing correspondences between the "model" and its fulfilment (Christ). Melito's theological purpose expressed in these texts is to depict the sacrifice of Christ as complete, as universally redemptive, and as fulfilling the purpose of (animal) sacrifice. Melito's soteriology is thus predicated on the biblical cult, evoked through sacrificial motifs and imagery drawn from Genesis 22, Isaiah 53, and the later Akedah tradition.

A final important consideration is whether and how these findings contribute to our understanding of "the Jewish-Melito question."⁷³ Our understanding of Melito's attitude to Judaism has largely been defined by his vituperative anti-Jewish rhetoric in *PP* (72-99) that accuses "Israel" of ingratitude and decide. Numerous studies have striven to determine the reasons for this bitter tirade.⁷⁴ Explanations include Kraabel and others' socio-historical arguments concerning the marginalized position of Christians in Sardis,⁷⁵ or Satran's suggestion that "an intimate knowledge of Jewish custom and tradition might have motivated the Christians of Sardis to want to strongly, even violently, dissociate themselves

⁷³ Knapp, "Melito," 370.

⁷⁴ For an overview of different scholarly positions see Stewart-Sykes, "Melito's Anti-Judaism," 271-279.

⁷⁵ Kraabel, "The Synagogue and the Jewish Community," (see n. 9).

from Judaism.”⁷⁶ Cohick and Lieu among others, have discussed the references to “Israel” in *PP*, whether they refer to contemporary Jews, to biblical Jews, or to a hypothetical Israel.⁷⁷ More plausibly, Knapp and Manis have remarked on Melito’s own ambivalence towards Judaism.⁷⁸ Regardless of what lay behind it, Melito’s rhetoric of deicide in *PP* had long-term, devastating consequences (see n. 1).

Melito’s *Fragments* provide useful additional insights into his stance on Jewish tradition. His extensive reliance on and response to Jewish exegeses and his use of multiple Akedah notions suggest their significance for him. Jewish exegeses gave substance to Melito’s writing, supplying motifs, images, and innovative readings of biblical characters and scenes, while being an impetus for his theology. Melito’s engagement with Akedah notions (even when they contradict the Genesis 22 narrative) convey the value he placed on Jewish interpretations and their potential enrichment of his own ideas.

Admittedly, Melito’s use of the Akedah tradition in his *Fragments* has been viewed as polemical by some scholars (see n. 8) who consider his main thrust to be to deny Jewish claims that the Isaac of the Akedah has intrinsic meaning and to find Isaac’s meaning instead through Jesus. Wilken (with reference to *Fragment 10*) observes that “the fragment pits Church against Synagogue, the new Israel against the old Israel.”⁷⁹ However, this study reveals that Melito’s response to Jewish exegeses in his *Fragments* is not primarily contentious or defensive. While Melito does employ typology, his emphasis is not a radically supersessionist denigration of the model. Although they present Christ as the fulfilment, the *Fragments* also intimate the abiding significance and inherent meaning of Akedah figures. When he declares that “Isaac caused astonishment and fear among men,” (*Fragment 9*) and refers to Isaac as the “righteous one,” (*Fragment 10*), could Melito be reflecting his own awed impressions of Akedah tradition?

Furthermore, the *Fragments*’ use of Jewish exegeses may be described as constructive (rather than polemical). By generating correspondences and contrasts between the cultic “model” and its “fulfillment,” Melito constructs a sacrificial depiction of Christ and his atoning death. It seems reasonable then to assert that by providing Melito a platform on which to develop his soteriological ideas and to envision new perspectives, the Jewish exegeses enabled Melito’s soteriology. The *Fragments* present a writer who esteems, engages with, and employs the biblical and exegetical traditions of the Jewish people. From this standpoint, the *Fragments* serve to confirm Boyarin’s assertion that early Jewish Christian interactions involved “much more than confrontation.”⁸⁰

Melito’s contributions to Jewish-Christian exegetical interactions deserve a more thorough investigation. Many of the themes found in Melito became com-

⁷⁶ Satran, “Anti-Jewish Polemic,” 58

⁷⁷ See Lynn Cohick, “Melito of Sardis’s *PERI PASCHA* and Its ‘Israel,’” *Harvard Theological Review* 91(1998): 3-372; Lieu, *Image*, 215-220.

⁷⁸ Knapp, “Melito,” 370. See also Manis, “Melito of Sardis,” 398.

⁷⁹ Wilken, “Melito,” 67.

⁸⁰ Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 20.

monplace in later patristic literature.⁸¹ For instance, Clement of Alexandria states that "Isaac only bore the wood of the sacrifice, as the Lord the wood of the cross" (*Paedagogus: Patrologia graeca* 8, 277 5), and "Isaac did everything but suffer, as was right, yielding the precedence in suffering to the Word." (*Paed.*: PG 8, 277 4). Could Melito's Akedah interpretations have influenced Clement?⁸² Additionally, Wilken remarks on Athanasius of Alexandria's references to the sacrifice of Isaac, "that what is made explicit in Athanasius is implicit already in Melito."⁸³ Research on the pioneering nature of Melito's use of Jewish exegeses in the context of patristic literature, and his possible impact on subsequent church fathers would be a noteworthy contribution both to patristic studies and to Jewish-Christian relations. Pertinent too are studies from Jewish perspectives, examining Melito's writings for evidence of early Christian influence on Jewish tradition.⁸⁴

What is our conclusion about the "Jewish-Melito question?" A straightforward answer eludes us. As Satran comments, "we know far too little about Melito, his career, or the nature of Jewish-Christian relations in second-century Asia Minor to draw firm conclusions..."⁸⁵ Nevertheless, for a fuller, nuanced consideration of his attitude to Judaism, future investigations on Melito would benefit from giving due attention not only to the harsh rhetoric in *Peri Pascha* but also to his *Fragments*. As this essay has established, Melito's use and re-vision of Akedah tradition in *Fragments 9, 10 and 11* bear important ramifications. The *Fragments* provide a glimpse of Melito's world, with its complex dynamic of early Christian-Jewish relations characterized by contact, tension, and creativity.⁸⁶

⁸¹ See the concluding chapter in Kessler, *Bound*, 175-183, for a summary of Akedah themes shared between patristic and rabbinic exegetes.

⁸² We can only speculate, keeping in view Eusebius' comment that Clement is said to have mentioned Melito in his own book on the Pascha which "was composed, [Clement] says, in consequence of Melito's" (*HE* 4.26), *History of the Church*, 133.

⁸³ Wilken, "Melito," 66, declares that in Athanasius' fourth century text, "the conflict between Christians and Jews over the sacrifice of Isaac is stated explicitly and polemically."

⁸⁴ On the possible influence of Melito's *Peri Pascha* on the *Dayenu* prayer in the Passover Haggadah, see Israel Yuval, "Easter and Passover as Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue" in *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times (Two Liturgical Traditions)*, eds. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffmann (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 98-124. See also his *Two Nations In Your Womb* (California: University of California Press, 2006).

⁸⁵ Satran, "Anti-Jewish Polemic," 58.

⁸⁶ I would like to thank Prof Jonathan Klawans, the anonymous reviewers, and the journal's editor for their feedback, as well as my colleagues at Curry College for their academic support.