

Circumcision: History, Scope, and Aim: Part I

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Abstract

The issue of circumcision has been vigorously discussed throughout human history. Discussions about its origin, history, purpose, and religious and social meanings have been ongoing since the first human civilizations, occurring within primitive tribes, slave-based societies, fortified cities, slave kingdoms, and empires (e.g., the Roman Empire). The topic has been taken up across feudal and modern kingdoms, and within modern capitalist and socialist societies. For example, the Nazis stand out for having used circumcision in their propaganda against Jews, and as an identifier to segregate Jews from others during their extermination. However, despite such prolonged and vigorous discussion, no consensus has been reached on the issue. Many well-based explanations for specific aspects of circumcision have been advanced (e.g., its origin, history, purpose, and religious and social meanings), yet each has contradicted the others. The aim of this paper is to determine the most plausible explanations for circumcision, within the context of various forms of genital manipulations that have been conducted across human history. It is difficult to cover all aspects of this topic in a relatively brief paper—indeed, it would also be difficult to cover the entire story in a voluminous book. In addition to the evidence available from other sources, special attention is paid to the passages from the Torah, the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, and the Koran.

Keywords

Circumcision, History, Protection against Sacrificing

1. Introduction

The external and internal sex organs and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis together represent the reproductive system [1]. The drive to reproduce is considered one of the most powerful among living creatures: “*Sex is the most im-*

portant driving force for the reproduction and preservation of species populations [63]. *In all species, the sexual drive and offspring preservation instinct prevail over hunger and even the instinct of self-preservation* [2]. In both plants and animals, the sex drive is predominantly seasonal. However, humans and their ancestor hominids have all possessed the ability to engage in sexual activity and reproduction all year round. In his 1876 unfinished essay “Anteil der Arbeit an der Menschwerdung des Affen”, Friedrich Engels wrote: “*the hand is not only the organ of labour, it is also the product of labour*”. Yet before the hand became “the product of labor” it became a tool of joy. Only monkeys, apes, and humans are able to use their hands as tools for sexual activity. As such, they have had a unique attraction to, and paid special attention to, their genitals.

Most assert that the Ancient-Egyptians created one of the first civilizations. However, prior to the Ancient-Egyptians civilization, there were other Negroid-civilizations in Africa. Female circumcision, a primarily African Negroid-custom, is not discussed in detail herein because it is an inhumane custom based on total selfishness. It is an ancient version of a “Belt of Fidelity” [3], the use of which was extensive in ancient Greece when warriors headed to war. Its main purpose was to prevent women and their partners from receiving pleasure from sexual acts and, in part, to reduce fertility (*i.e.*, as with female circumcision) by preventing complete expulsion of menstrual blood from the womb. It may be that in African civilizations, reducing fertility was the primary rationale, to maintain a balance between population size and available resources.

Obviously, preventing overpopulation was critical to ensuring adequate supply of water and food for the population, however, preventing people from having sex was impossible. Birth control devices and abortion were unknown at that time. The scarcity of resources has been a primary problem from the time of Neanderthal man to the present day. Neanderthals solved this problem by eating their newborns during famine and the practice of child sacrifice has continued to modern times [4]; likewise, cannibalism has been practiced around the globe, up to modern times [5] [6] [7].

To solve such resource problems, the Ancient Romans used massive gladiator games, fed the muraenas (a genus of eel in the family *Muraenidae*) by slaves’ flesh, in circus arenas for entertainment have been fed to the wild animals by men’, women’, and children’ and destroyed cities and even nations, as occurred to the ancient city of Carthage. During early Christianity, the Church instigated witch-hunts, religious wars, and the Crusades wars. Today, wars continue to play a significant role in population reduction [8], as does the nontraditional sex.

In Australia, the Aboriginal people’s resources were so severely limited that without restricting the number of people in their population, sustaining life would have been impossible. Aborigines solved this problem by penile manipulation, in which the phallus’ urethra was sliced through from the testes to its opening. This procedure did not reduce either the man’s ability to have intercourse or his sexual pleasure, but it did largely reduce the number of sperm in-

roduced to his partner's vagina and thus significantly reduced the likelihood of pregnancy. However, notably, this manipulation does not resemble circumcision, but rather is an example of the many forms of sex organ manipulation that humans have used throughout our history.

In this paper, we present evidence to support the theory that circumcision originated in Africa in the Ancient Egyptian civilization and was adopted by Jews, who later introduced it to Arabs, who imposed the practice on all Muslims. Some non-Jews and non-Muslims also practice circumcision (e.g., among those in Ethiopia and some Christians).

1.1. Circumcision as an Ancient Egyptian Custom

On the door of the sixth dynasty tomb of Pharaoh Ankhmahor, a circumcision scene is depicted: "*The depiction in Ankhmahor's tomb is worth reviewing. Dating to Dynasty 6 and specifically to the reign of King Teti (2355-2343 BCE), it is the oldest extant depiction of the act of circumcision from Ancient Egypt. Here is a line-art version of the depiction, which appears on the east thickness of a doorway in the tomb*" [9].

In this image, Hamitic priests circumcise young, white Asian males (probably Semites) [9]. This is indisputable historical and archeological evidence of the Ancient Egyptian's use of circumcision. Osiris, who founded and served as the first king and later as God of Ancient Egypt, introduced the prohibition on eating pork [10] and persuaded the Egyptian people to stop consuming the flesh of humans and apes. He also likely introduced the custom of circumcision. Because Pharaoh Teti's reign predated the Hyksos Invasion (in circa 1650 BCE [11]), the custom cannot be attributed to the Hyksos, who were a mixture of different people, including Semites. Since the time of Osiris, or at least from the reign of Pharaoh Teti, human society was divided into those who ate pork, consumed blood, and were uncircumcised, and those who did not eat pork or did not consume blood, and were circumcised.

1.2. Human Immolation

There exists no archeological evidence of human offerings to the gods in Ancient Egypt. Judaic belief also opposed human sacrifice, as evidenced by **Leviticus 18:21** in which the Lord commanded: "*You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord*". Worshiping to Molech and Baal clearly involved ritual child sacrifice, something forbidden to God's people and punishable by death according to **Leviticus 20:2**: "*Any one of the people of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech shall surely be put to death*" [12].

1.3. Custom of Circumcision

Circumcision is practiced in one of three ways: the ancient traditional method, the now-common method later introduced by rabbis, and the medical method

used by most non-Jews and non-Muslims. The latter is disconnected from religion or tradition, with a rationale generally attributed to hygiene. Medical circumcision was widely used by the British Army prior to, and particularly during, WWII to prevent military personal serving in Asia and Africa from contracting sexually transmitted diseases. In some regions of Africa still practice circumcision with the goal of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS among special groups. However, it is clear that medical circumcision for the purpose of preventing sexually transmitted diseases has no evidence basis. Likewise, notions that circumcision will prevent boys from masturbating or developing epilepsy are both baseless and seem bizarre.

2. Holy Books Authorship

The first five books of the Old Testament were supposedly written by Moses. Highly educated and possibly an Egyptian prince or priest, he undoubtedly knew several languages and understood politics, the basis of religion, and all forms of science of the day. However, the primary texts available to us were written at least a thousand years after Moses, in Babylon.

Likewise, Jesus was also highly educated, and, in the scriptures, he was often referred to by his disciples as the Rabbi. He even preached in the Temple *Beit HaMikdash*. Doubtless, he also knew Hebrew, Aramean, Greek, and Latin. However, the Gospels were written at least a hundred, possibly several hundred years after Jesus' time and have been heavily edited and corrected since then.

Although Muhamad is described as illiterate in both the Koran and the Hadith, this is likely untrue. He was a skilled merchant and an important leader who traveled the deserts over the whole Arabian Peninsula, possibly even to the Byzantine and Persian Empires. He clearly knew how to count and translate currencies, since he understood the prices of wares across these diverse regions and managed to buy and sell them for optimal prices. He would also have needed to deal in these places with diverse peoples in their own languages. He must also have been a skilled administrator and military leader (beyond the evidence of his successes described in the Koran and other Islamic texts); in the desert and in these foreign countries, he would have needed to protect his caravan and goods from theft and fraud. Some of the Suras in the Koran were obviously authored by him, while others were heavily edited or authored by others. The Koran available to us was written at least a hundred years after Muhamad's time, although many its Suras were recorded during Muhamad's lifetime.

The Torah, Bible and the Koran are considered holy books. In their present form, parts of these texts were written by others, centuries after the prophets who are taken to be their authors. The primary contributions of Moses are considered to be the Ten Commandments and some of the laws, prohibitions, rules and customs, but not the entire text of the Torah. Strong evidence suggests that the modern text of the Torah includes elaborations during the time when the Babylonians captured and enslaved Jews.

Each chapter and story in the Torah was written in a manner to present events in a highly tendentious light by the author(s). However, in every story, there is also a subtext that reveals—to the careful reader—an incorporated truth, the real meaning of events, and even the text’s purpose. The Torah proclaims that it is the history of all mankind and that the people of Israel have been a part of that entire history.

The New Testament of the Bible and the Gospels were certainly not written by Jesus, although they may have been written by apostles many years, or even centuries, after his time. The Church cannot prove that a single letter was written by Jesus himself. From the many known Gospels, only some were chosen for inclusion in the Bible. Furthermore, these were edited versions that the Church allowed the people to know, banning the others at the First Council of Nicaea (/nar'si:ə/; Greek: Νίκαια [nikea]) in AD 325 under the rule of Roman Emperor Constantine I.

In various Suras of the Koran, the Koran itself is mentioned as having existed when that Sura was written. It is an indisputable fact that the Koran in its known form was compiled and edited from earlier versions that existed during Muhammad’s time, from the texts of his lectures, prayers, commandments, laws, aphorisms, etc. No one tries to hide this fact. What influence later writers and editors had on the text of the Koran, and especially on the Hadith, is unclear, but obviously there was some.

As with the Torah, the texts of the Gospels and Koran were written in a very tendentious manner. This is especially true regarding the Aggadah (in Hebrew: הַגְּדוּה, which means “telling”; plural, Aggadot). The Aggadot are a part of Judaic Oral Law (תורה שבעל פה) and provide the authoritative interpretation of the Written Law, supplying meaning for different stories in the Holy books of Judaism. The noncanonical apocryphal stories perform the same functions for the New Testament’s and the Hadith’s function for explaining and interpreting the Koran. Indeed, the Aggadot, noncanonical apocryphal stories, and the Hadith were often written on political bases, during times of distinct political events, and are highly politicized. Rabbis, priests, and mullahs who adopted the Aggadot, noncanonical apocryphal stories, and the Hadith do not always agree about these texts, either with their predecessors or even with the authors of the original holy texts. In other words, the interpretations we use today may not be accurate or may require reevaluation. Because all three of these holy books originated from the Middle East, it is also interesting to connect discussion of these fundamental books with Homer’s epic poems, the Iliad and the Odyssey, which too describe the ancient world and events, and a pantheon of deities.

2.1. Names

Ancient names of cities or individuals were usually combinations of several simple names. The name of a local god or goddess was often a part of these combined names. Tracing these can be useful for discovering historical truths. In-

vaders often gave cities new names (e.g., *Danzig* was changed to *Gdansk*) to erase the memory of the original owner's populations. Troy (in Ancient Greek: Τροία, Troía) was originally named Ílion or Ἴλιος, as has been reviled in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by Homer.

Homer's epic poems are about the Mycenaean or Bronze Age, about 1600-1100BC.

Moses led the Jews out of Egypt and Homer's epic poems are about fell of Troy some where around 1300-1200BCE.

Not all Semites were monotheistic at that time, just as not all Semites were Jews or Arabs who followed the Abrahamic religion. In the period 1600-1100BC, within the Phoenicians' pantheon of deities, the Supreme God was the God of Sky or Heaven. His name was *Il*, pronounced by other tribes as *El* or even *Al*. From this came the Hebrew *Elohim* and Arabic *Allah*. Translation of the city name Ílion is *Divine* or *City of God Il*. Support for this theory comes from the names: *Ishmail* or *Ismael*, *Samuil* or *Samuel*, *Gabreil* or *Gabriel*, *Israil* or *Israel*, etc. Within all of these names, we find the name of the Deity *Il* or *El*. Undoubtedly, Ílion was a Semitic city and probably a Phoenician city. Additional support for this theory is that the King (or, more correctly, the Tsar) of Ílion was named Priam, a combination of the names *Pri* and *am*—as in *Adam*, *Ad* and *am* and *Abraham* אַבְרָהָם, *Abra h* and *am*, the letter *h* in Hebrew is the definite article הַ אֲבִיר. Further, *Hiram*, *Hir* and *am*, was the king of the Phoenician city Tyre. In **2 Kings 8:4**, Jehoram King of Judah is Jehor and *am* and in **2 Kings 14:16**, Jeroboam II King of Israel is Jerobo and *am*. Many other Semitic names also end in *am*, which means nation.

2.2. Customs of Ancient World

The Judaism and Islam have highly distinct laws, philosophies, and customs, including many prohibitions. These prohibitions were introduced to divide the people of the Book and the Koran from polytheistic idolatry.

During this period of history, sacrificing animals and humans to idols was a common practice in polytheistic idolatry. Polytheistic idols were the predecessors of polytheistic gods and goddesses, as monotheistic idols were the predecessors of monotheistic deities. The philosophies surrounding polytheistic idolatry united the deities of the ancient world and humans. Humans used sacrifices to ask the idols for favors and help. Sacrificing animals was very common. However, human sacrifices, especially of children, were of the greatest value, and this can be observed even today [4]. The practice was well described by Homer in his epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in the passages about the Trojan War. In this tale, Agamemnon, King of Mycenae, offends the goddess Artemis, who retaliates by preventing the Greek troops from sailing to Troy. Agamemnon then offers Iphigenia (his child daughter) to Artemis in sacrifice, to calm the sea and allow the soldiers to sail against Troy.

The paper "Why Judaism and Islam Prohibit Eating Pork and Consuming

Blood as a Food?” [10] proposes an origin for the prohibition on eating pork by Jews and Muslims. According to the myth, Osiris introduced this prohibition to prevent cannibalism and the consumption of unclean meats. It is impossible to find archeological evidence that pigs were reared in Ancient Egypt, just as it is impossible to find archeological or mythological evidence that human sacrifice was practiced in Ancient Egypt. It is possible that Osiris also introduced a prohibition on human sacrifice. Jews adopted the prohibition on human sacrifice and, because of this, fought vigorously against the Canaanites who commonly sacrificed humans, especially their children, to Molech. The first mention of Molech was in **Leviticus 18:21**: “*You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord*”. From the time of Osiris, human society was divided into those who sacrificed humans to the idols and deities, and those who did not.

Judaism and Islam were not always as we know them today. In the Bible, **Judges 18:10** and **18:11**, “*The Danites Settle in Laish*”, is written: “*There the Danites set up for themselves the idols...*” this is strongly contradicting several of the Ten Commandments; **Exodus 19:13**: “*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.*” and “*You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water below*”.

Human sacrifice to the gods was customary not only among the Canaanites, but also among some Jews. In the Bible, **Judges 11:30**: “*Japhthah made a vow to the Lord: “If you give the Ammonites into my hands, ...”* and in **31**: “*... whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord’s and I will sacrifice as burnt offering*”; and in **34**: “*When Japhthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines!*”; and **39**: “*... he did to her as he had vowed ...*” [13].

2.3. Lack of Evidence

No evidence, archaeological or textual within or beyond the Torah, exists to support the notion that the practice of circumcision was customary among the Canaanites. Homer did not mention a word about circumcision was customary in Ílion (Troy). Nor did the Roman historians Titus Livius or Appian of Alexandria write anything about circumcision occurring among either the Carthaginians or those of other Phoenician settlements in North Africa. From Ílion on the Sea of Marmara to Ancient Babylonia in Mesopotamia, neither the Sumerians nor the Akkadians or the Assyrians, where the cult of God *Il*, *El*, or *Al* was common, knew of or adopted the custom of circumcision.

There is no description, nor is there support from archeological evidence, that this custom was used in connection with the cult of God *Il*, *El*, *Al*, or other Semitic deities before Abraham first time visited Egypt. Even in the Old Testament, *Eliezer from Damascus*, whom Abraham rescued on his way to Canaan,

was apparently uncircumcised. Name Eliezer in Hebrew means “*God (El) in the aid*”, indicating that Eliezer was a believer in *God El*. Abraham, when heading to Canaan and for a long time, thereafter, was also uncircumcised.

According to the Torah, Abraham was circumcised at the age of 90 years. It is also written that Eliezer and all other males in Abraham’s family were circumcised at the same time. Interpretation of the story about Abraham’s attempt of sacrifice Itzhak to the God *Il* or *El* is frequently incorrect understood and will be reinterpreted later in this series of papers.

This cumulative evidence supports the notion that circumcision during the pre-Abrahamic period examined was neither a Semitic custom nor required by God *Il*, *El*, or *Al* or other Semitic deities.

3. Circumcision to Prevent Sacrifice to the Idols and Other Deities of Humans

Idolaters and others who used living sacrifices as offerings to the idols or deities sacrificed only those (*i.e.*, animals or humans) who were without defect. Living offerings needed to lack even hidden defects. Sacrifice of living offerings with defects was considered a profane offense in the eyes of the deities. As such, priests had to examine carefully sacrificed objects who were to be offered.

King or God Osiris knew that stopping men from sacrificing humans to the idols or other deities would not occur by any type of persuasion, commandment, or prohibition. Instead, he introduced a religious custom, circumcision, as an alternative. A circumcised individual already gave a part of his body to the Deity, and he is defective, insofar as they are not as originally created by God, and thus unsuitable for sacrifice. A clue about this can be found in the Torah, when Zipporah (one of the seven daughters of Jethro, a Midianite shepherd and priest, Zipporah who became a wife of Moses) circumcised her two sons to prevent Moses from sacrificing the children to the deity of Mount Sinai (potentially Yahweh). In English [13], **Exodus 4:10**: “*At a lodging place on the way, the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him*”. It is in contradictory that the Lord ordered Moses to free the nation from slavery and simultaneously attempted to kill Moses. Even in the Hebrew version, this is unclear and fragmented. Thus, it may have been another deity who sought the death of Moses. However, in **Exodus 4:10** we find: in English translation that Zipporah has taken the flint blade, cut off the foreskin of her son/s, and she throws the foreskin to his feet with the words: “*Take it, you are my bloody bridegroom.*” Under no circumstances would Zipporah have told the Lord that He was her bridegroom. She had not even become devoted or converted to Yahweh. Even in the English translation, “**his**” is written as a proper noun (but not with capital letters) as would be the case if referring not to a deity. The implication that Zipporah threw the foreskin at the feet of the deity is a simple profanation of the text’s meaning. Only Moses was her bridegroom and husband. If priests would interpret Zipporah’s telling that the Lord that He is her bridegroom this will be and is a blasphemy. Rather,

it is either a simple misunderstanding of the text by a Greek translator, or a bold interpretation.

The correct story is that Zipporah was afraid that Moses might sacrifice her sons to the Lord as a way of asking Him to grant to Moses success in this risky undertaking. By performing the circumcision, she ensured their sons were unsuitable as offerings to the Lord.

Despite the presence of the two verses (24 and 25) in **Exodus 4:10**, they are not necessarily interconnected. The deity who sought the death of Moses could have been one of the Egyptian deities. This is similar to the Koran in which two Suras can be complete in their individual meanings, while superimposing the meaning of one on the other is incorrect. The Prophet Muhamad said that the Koran and all prayers must be in Arabic, because translation would change their meanings and cause them to lose power and originality.

3.1. Other Examples of Incorrectly Translated Texts in Holy Books

Another example of an essentially incorrect translation from the Torah is presented below. There were proclaimed by the Catholic Church in during of two thousand years that the birth of Jesus was predicted in the Torah, **Isaiah 6:7** “14: *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The **virgin** will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*” [13]. In the Norwegian version, “Den Hellige Skrift Biblen Det Gamle og Det Nye Testamentet 2 utgave,” printed in 1985 [14], it is written that: “14: *Derfor skal Herren selv gi dere et tegn: Se, en **jomfru** skal bli med barn; hun skal føde en sønn og gi ham navnet Immanuel.*” The word-for-word translation from Norwegian to English becomes: “*Wherefore, the Lord himself shall give unto you a sign: Behold, a **virgin** shall be with child; she will give birth to a son and name him Immanuel.*” However, after it was discovered that the original translation from Hebrew to Greek had been badly misinterpreted, the new text of the Bible [15] was corrected to: “*Derfor skal Herrens elvgedere et tegn: Se, den **ungejenta** skal bli med barn og føde sønn, og hun skal gi ham navnet Immanuel.*” [15]. The translation from Norwegian to English now becomes: “*Wherefore, the Lord himself shall give unto you a sign: Behold, the **young girl** shall come with child, and give birth to a son, and she shall name him Immanuel.*” From 1985 [14] to 2011 [15] translations, there is a significant new interpretation of the holy text: **Isaiah 6:7** had not predicted the birth of Jesus. The mother of Immanuel was not a **virgin**, she was a **young girl**. The mistake originated from a translator whose Hebrew was weak and who by this has established a new postulate in the Catholic Church, which had consequences during two thousand years.

4. Conclusions

The main conclusions from this discussion are as follows.

1) The custom of circumcision originated in Ancient Egypt, which is supported by archeological evidence in the form of an image on the tomb of

Ankhamor, which has been dated as early as 2500 years BCE.

2) It is possible that this custom was introduced by King or Deity Osiris.

3) The custom of circumcision was borrowed from the Egyptians by the Jews, who introduced it to Arabs.

4) Beyond hygienic aspects or religious tradition, circumcision was meant to serve as a protection against males being sacrificed to the deities.

5) The preceding point is likely the core of this custom's origin: preventing human sacrifice to the deities is the most plausible explanation for this custom.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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