Yitzhaq Feder’s book, an outgrowth of the author’s PhD thesis, on *Blood Expiation in Hittite and Biblical Ritual* concentrates on the biblical sin offering (חטאת) and its Hittite parallels, antecedents, related development, and meaning of the rituals. After a brief introduction setting the scene, chapter 1 presents the main Hurro-Hittite evidence, concentrating on the zurki (Hurrian for blood; the Hittite verb root is ḫarmuma-) and related uzzi (Hurrian for flesh) rites. These include the Papanikri birth ritual (Kbo 5.1/TH 476), the Šamuha ritual (KUB 29.7+/CTH 480), the ritual of Walkui (Kbo 32.176/CTH 496), a ritual for the purification of a defiled sanctuary (Kbo 23.1+/CTH 472), and a foundation ritual for a new cultic structure (Kbo 15.24+) and a cult expansion ritual (CTH 481). Reference to oracular inquiries and to an Assyrian letter to Esarhaddon is also mentioned. Most pertinent excerpts from the Hittite rituals (and the Assyrian letter) are presented in transliteration and English translation. Issues that relate to readings and meanings of words and expressions are considered.

In chapter 2 Feder analyzes the related biblical ritual descriptions in Lev 4–5 and 8, Exod 29, Ezek 43 and 45, and Lev 13–14 and 16. The author presents both a synchronic and diachronic analysis of each passage. The former concentrates on the overall meaning of the material, and the latter assigns each passage to its original ritual material and later
outgrowth by P and H. In this, for Feder, P precedes H, much in line with the general approach of scholars such as Knohl and Milgrom. Feder, however, does not hesitate to present his own source divisions that diverge from previous ones. As for the characteristics of the postulated P and H layers, according to Feder H provides more explicit elucidation of the meaning of each ritual.

Feder traces in chapter 3 a possible historical connection between the Hittite and biblical rituals. Feder argues that the similarities are not coincidental. At the same time, save for the zukru festival from Emār, which itself belongs to the same geographical sphere as Anatolia and ancient Israel, there is little resemblance between rites in this sphere and rites elsewhere, for example, in Assyria and Greece. Feder confirms a Syrian origin for the rituals, which has been suggested previously, and argues for dissemination via the Hurrians, whose existence is well-attested in Ugarit, even from the perspective of ritual tradition (see 124). Feder here also makes mention of the burnt and well-being rituals that are often seen together, represented by the Hurrian ambašši and keldi and the Ugaritic šrp and šlmm. Also, the rituals examined in the book come from Kizzuwatna, which is located in southeastern Anatolia (one may keep in mind that Hittite has a number of Hurrian loanwords, including the words zurki and uzi). Feder then presents the birth ritual KUB 9.22+ and compares it with the biblical purification ritual in Lev 14. A number of similarities are pointed out, including purification with sticks bundled with red thread, use of two birds, daubing blood on the body, and purificatory anointment. Feder then further looks at the birth ritual Kbo 17.65 in comparison with Lev 12. He points out the differing purificatory periods in these rituals depending on the gender of the child but thinks that there are in this case enough differences to suggest the possibility of coincidence.

Beginning with chapter 4, part 2 of the book concentrates more on the meaning of the relevant rituals than their historical analysis. In chapter 4 Feder discusses the theory of signs. Interacting with social-sciences literature, he presents the theory that signs generally develop from the concrete to the abstract. An interesting related feature is that, once signs have become more abstract and detached from their original meaning, more explanation is often needed to elucidate the meaning.

In chapter 5 Feder describes the meaning of the biblical כפר. Feder suggests that this is originally tied to concepts of bloodguilt and blood compensation, in interaction with an analysis of the biblical asylum laws in particular (e.g., Num 35). Feder (summary on 195) then suggests that originally related concepts developed from appeasement for bloodguilt to expiation for bloodguilt to cultic expiation and, finally, to expiation for sin (in biblical prophetic, wisdom, and psalmic literature). Feder further discusses the role of blood and spirit in Lev 17:11. Except for the proposed exegetical meaning of the passage in terms of the proposed role and meaning of blood and נפש, a main point arising from the analysis
is that the H passage provides reinterpretation of the ritual, attesting to a later development where the original meaning is already some distance away from the time of the author, in line with considerations of the previous chapter.

Feder discusses in chapter 6 the origins, context, and meaning of the Hurro-Hittite zurki rite. He suggests that the uses of blood range from being a propitiatory gift or bribe to chthonic deities, a currency of compensation and an agent of purification to an agent of consecration (229). Feder argues that the concept of appeasement and compensation for bloodguilt is the most original one, in line with the biblical כפר. The proposed development is then toward a growing use of metaphorical appropriation in relation to the concepts of sin and atonement (235–36). As part of this, the notion of impersonal mechanistic action and consequence tied in with the ritual appropriation, especially in collective contexts (236). Feder then discusses further the dynamics of bloodguilt by a comparison of §6 of the Hittite Laws and Deut 21:1–9, also drawing on correspondence between the Babylonian monarch Kadašman-Enlil II and the Hittite king Hattušili III. A table summarizing the rationale of the Hittite blood rites concludes the chapter.

In chapter 7 Feder draws together a number of the considerations and traces the origins, translation, and transition of the blood rite from its Syri­an origins through P, H, and beyond in Judaism and Christianity. For Feder, the origins of P lie in the Late Bronze Syrian concepts; at the same time, the current form of the biblical texts is a result of subsequent later transformation and editing. In rough summary, P codified the rituals into a form that expresses an autonomous process for removal of guilt and impurity, H provided them with meaning of a process of reconciliation with God, Judaism used them for legal exegesis, Christianity for allegorical exegesis (258). According to Feder, there is a “continuous transforming dialogue between the objectified ritual and its changing cultural context in which the interpretation of the former is progressively subordinated to the latter” (259). In the evolution of the meaning, once the underlying code no can no longer be seen as self-evident and natural, it is recontextualized (and reinterpreted). With H, according to Feder, “the moment a rite requires a verbalized rationale, such as H’s rationales for cultic acts, it is clear that the original trust in the mechanics of the ritual has been compromised” (260). A final chapter that summarizes the considerations made concludes the book.

Overall, the book provides an excellent and convincing, even indisputable, argument for the Late Bronze Age (and possibly even earlier, as one may ask the question of how far back the traditions attested in the Late Bronze Age documents go) origin of concepts relating to the חטא rituals in P. The historical connection through the Hurrians is completely plausible, at the very least (cf. similarly my recent book on Joshua). By implication, and keeping in mind the attestation of burnt and well-being rituals in the
same sphere, the ritual materials in P in general can be expected to have their origin in Late Bronze Age (or earlier) traditions. This, of course, has important implications for Old Testament scholarship in general. However, the book also contains interesting, even at times fascinating, reflection on other related issues. These include the meaning and symbolism of both the Hittite and biblical rituals (including the discussion of signs in ch. 4 and the discussion of נפש in ch. 5), as well as the relationship and possible diachronic development of P and H. On these merits alone, the book should be read by anyone working on these two corpora of postulated Pentateuchal sources or interested in the Pentateuch as a whole or in the development of Israelite cult and ritual in general. I think the book can be read profitably and its main arguments followed by those who have not done any work on the Hittite (and, secondarily, Akkadian) language. However, such readers will not be able to follow a fair number of comments made on the Hittite, mostly in the footnotes. In that sense, the book can have only a limited readership in its full extent, even though, again, I think that it can be read profitably by a biblical scholar with the limitations just expressed. As a whole, this is an excellent and stimulating study, even outstanding in a number of respects.

At the same time, I have a few critical comments. These are not intended to detract from the usefulness of the book but to provide thought for further reflection. The presentation of the book is highly technical, and the book is not a quick read. The author’s use of English is also not always entirely lucid in terms of grammar and word choices. Also, the presentation is sometimes not clear in itself; for example, the treatment of the proposed diachronic development of Lev 16 (81–97) was hard to follow, and it would have been helpful to use more sign posts, summaries, and cross-references to points already made. This applies throughout the book (e.g., on 112 to comments on Ezek 40–48 on 59; see also 232, 238, 244). Sometimes things do not seem to be connected as smoothly as they could be in a more general sense. For one example, see the depersonalized depiction of making compensation for spilled blood as a prebiblical source (271). While this is acceptable, the author does not see it as the initial stage of the Hurro-Hittite development (which one might expect by implication; see 268–69), and it can thus be slightly confusing. All this said, the presentation is ultimately understandable. Nevertheless, the book could have been a quicker and easier read if it were more lucid and ironed out.

The book could also have been better served by having more comprehensive subject indexes. It would have been good if the relevant Hittite texts had been presented fully in English translation in an appendix. In addition, for the more technical-minded, some photos of the tablets and related transcriptions might have been useful to verify some of the readings firsthand. Finally, a full glossary of Hittite would have been useful especially for those biblical scholars who do not read Hittite or have only fairly basic skills in the language. Such additions would, of course, add to the publishing costs.
There is also the odd typographical error in the book, especially a Hebrew word is written from left to right on a few occasions, the odd grammatical error and misspelling, and a couple of other minor errors (see, e.g., 266 line 5 versus 170 par. 3 line 1).

From my background of a biblical rather than a Hittite scholar, the translations from the Hittite seemed to me generally very good and sensible. The same goes for restorations, even though one could, of course, form a comprehensive opinion only if one could compare against tablets and their transcriptions. I was questioning or of a slightly different opinion about the translations only in a few places: 27 line 27 (even though the translation given seems fairly reasonable), 126 line 27 (does har-na-a-i-in refer to a harnai substance or the birth stool [also harnai, cf. line 20 above], I think it could be the latter, in which case the priest touches the birth stool with the cedar, tamarisk, and olive sticks, then purifies the mouth of the woman, perhaps using these utensils, daubed on the blood previously daubed on the birth stool [line 20]. This would then affect the following analysis somewhat), and 214 lines 7 (could la-hu-wa-i refer to libation?) and 10 (is UG₆ really blood here?).

I also have a number of comments in relation to postulated diachronic developments. Feder’s suggestions about earlier pre-Israelite traditions taken in to P and then edited by H (one could presumably ultimately argue vice versa if one were to advocate priority of H to P) seem to me to be generally convincing. At the same time, I was not entirely convinced about all of the detailed argumentation, even though much of this has to do with the general nature of source and redaction criticism, in that its details must always involve a degree of speculation. On a related note, we can see from the book that interpreting various elements in a differing manner can make a difference to the diachronic analysis (and vice versa). For example, in this context, could the narrative link between Lev 16 and 10 be derived from the general holiness of Yahweh, as shown by the Nadab and Abihu incident? If so, this would apply to either approaching Yahweh (Lev 16) or to what is being offered to him (Lev 10), rendering unnecessary the perceived inconsistency and thus at least some of the diachronic analysis based on this (83–84). It should be remembered here that even a redaction-critical explanation that uses diachronic methods may have to involve a type of harmonization of the text, if only to say that materials were incorporated in a pericope in two or more phases without apparent harmonization or only partial harmonization by the editors.

From another angle in regard to diachronic considerations, Feder sees expiation for the sanctuary and sevenfold sprinkling to belong to the H layer and also as indicating a later stage in the development of the biblical rituals (88; cf. 46–48, 64–67), yet he himself presents a Hittite ritual for the purification of a defiled sanctuary from the Late Bronze Age (20–23). Also, the Hittite temple ritual for establishing new cultic structures again
presented and summarized by the author himself (23–32) seems to involve washing the wall of a new temple, even if, as is suggested, it is also fair to suggest that this may involve transferring the essence of the deity to the new temple (31). Further, sprinkling seven times can be broadly compared with the sevenfold drawing of a deity from the ground or from a wall in the Hittite ritual presented by Feder (27, 29). Moreover, in general, sanctuaries in the ancient Near East were considered holy already from early times, and deities could leave their sanctuaries if not worshiped properly, with catastrophic consequences for the people in question, so one could argue that a ritual to purify a sanctuary should fit the bill easily, assuming that an idea to devise such a ritual could have arisen at an early time, which is (to my mind) obviously very plausible. Again, even if such a rite were a latecomer in the Hittite texts (as argued by Feder?), it has demonstrably already developed by the late Bronze Age, so there is no prima facie reason to assume that it developed in Israel only later, even if this is of course possible as such. In connection with this, arguments on 234–35 about the diachronic priority of Hittite conceptions seem to me to be fairly tenuous, also as it seems that the number of ritual texts based on which they are made is limited, and the texts in concern are constrained to only two locations (apparently due to accidents of survival). Moreover, the diachronic development proposed on these pages actually seems to contradict the idea of overall development in both Hittite and biblical texts from propitiation to expiation presented elsewhere (e.g., 253). Whatever the actual diachronic process(es), I find the main proposal sensible, notably a conceptual origin in “concrete” issues, the ideas of which were subsequently expanded through metaphoric connotations.

Finally, one question to ask is why P explains less about the meaning of the rituals than H. As already indicated, Feder suggests a later time for H, when people needed explanation as the original meanings of the rituals were lost or in need of reinterpretation. However, if P is more about manuals for priests and H has a more popular character, this might just make sense. As such it would not necessitate a long time between the P and H redactions. Feder also does suggest a more theistic focus by H as one reason (271). In other words, some issues explained diachronically in the book may have another explanation. By way of a final summary, this is a very worthy and stimulating study.