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ANIMAL SACRIFICE IN ANCIENT ZOROASTRIANISM: A RITUAL AND ITS INTERPRETATIONS¹

ALBERT DE JONG

The subject of the present article are the rites of animal sacrifice in ancient Zoroastrianism, that is to say rituals in which the life of an animal is taken and its meat handled in the history of Zoroastrianism up to the tenth century CE. These rituals have been studied in depth by other scholars and have been a prominent aspect in debates on the original intentions of Zarathustra and the development of the Zoroastrian tradition. Animal sacrifice has been a controversial subject in the study of Zoroastrianism for a long time, both because of Western notions of the spirituality of "true" Zoroastrianism and because of the fact that the ritual has been abandoned by the best known and most self-conscious modern Zoroastrian community, the Parsi community of India. Whereas modern developments are not our concern here, it should be noted that animal sacrifice is a living ritual in modern Irani Zoroastrianism and is known to have been practised by the Parsis up to the late nineteenth century. It was one of the vital rituals of Zoroastrianism in the ancient, pre-Islamic, period. Modern observers have frequently expressed difficulties in connecting the ritual with ideas surrounding death and killing in Zoroastrian literature. This has led to a larger emphasis being placed on theological interpretations of animal sacrifice than on the meaning of the ritual for lay Zoroastrians. It is always difficult to extract lay religiosity from the priestly Zoroastrian writings, but we shall see two very different appreciations of animal sacrifice reflected in Zoroastrian literature which in all likelihood correspond to priestly speculations and more generally held views on the subject.

We shall begin with a quick overview of the history of the study of animal sacrifice in Zoroastrianism and then depart from the earliest almost complete description of the ritual in the writings of the Pontic

¹ The following abbreviations are used to refer to Iranian texts: *Dk.* = *Dēnkard*; *GBd.* = *Greater Bundahišn*; *N.* = *Nērangestān*; *PhlRDd.* = *Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī dēnīg*; *SDN* = *Šad dar-e nasr*; *ŠnŠ* = *Šāyest nē-šāyest*; *SupplTxtŠnŠ* = *Supplementary Texts to the Šāyest nē-šāyest*; *Vd.* = *Vendīdād*; *Y.* = *Yasna*; *Yt.* = *Yašt*.

Greek geographer Strabo of Amaseia. Then, we shall reconstruct the phases of the ritual itself and try to unravel the various interpretations of the ritual as they (seem to) have existed from the early days up to the early Islamic period.

1. *Studying animal sacrifice in Zoroastrian history*

Zoroastrian rituals to the present day require the presence of a representative of animal life in the ritual offering and tasting of a cake and its complements, as part of the celebration of the *drōn*-ritual, either incorporated into the *Yasna*, the daily high ritual, or as a separate rite.² This representative of the animal kingdom is called in Middle Persian *gōšūdāg*, a word derived from Avestan *geuš huddā*, "beneficent cow." In modern rituals, the *gōšūdāg* most often is a piece of ghee or butter, but from Irani Zoroastrian rituals and ritual texts concerning pre-modern Zoroastrianism, it is clear that a piece of meat from a sacrificial animal was a common (though not the only) source of the *gōšūdāg*. One of the distinctive differences between the modern Irani and Parsi Zoroastrian communities, based in the Islamic Republic of Iran and India respectively, is the fact that Irani Zoroastrians have preserved the rites of animal sacrifice, whereas Parsi Zoroastrians have abandoned them, probably under pressure of the local Hindu population. Animal sacrifices in Irani Zoroastrian traditions, however, are not very frequent;³ the comparative rarity of the rite in modern Zoroastrianism should not blind us to the fact that in ancient Zoroastrianism, animal sacrifice was a normal and regular part of religious life.⁴

² Cf. M. Boyce & F.M. Kotwal, "Zoroastrian *Bāj* and *Drōn* I," *BSOAS* 34 (1971) 56–73; K.M. Jamasp-Asa, "On the *drōn* in Zoroastrianism," in *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce* (Acta Iranica 24; Leiden: Brill, 1985) 335–356; F.M. Kotwal and J.W. Boyd, *A Persian Offering. The Yasna: A Zoroastrian High Liturgy* (Studia Iranica Cahier 8; Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes 1991) 94–97 with n. 89; J.J. Modi, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees* (Bombay: British India Press, 1922) 281–282.

³ For these rituals, cf. M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism I: The Early Period* (Handbuch der Orientalistik 1.8.1.2.2.1; Leiden: Brill, 1975) 149–157; ead., *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 157–158; 244–246; ead., "Ātaš-zōhr and Āb-zōhr", *JRAS* (1966) 100–118; ead., 'Mihragān among the Irani Zoroastrians', in J.R. Hinnells, ed., *Mithraic Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971) 106–118.

⁴ For which, cf. A. de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi. Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 133; Leiden: Brill 1997) 357–362.

Although there is a broad scholarly consensus on this issue nowadays, the status of animal sacrifice in Zoroastrianism has been hotly debated in the first half of the twentieth century. Certain passages in the Gāthās, the earliest Zoroastrian texts, ascribed to Zarathustra himself, had suggested to some that the prophet was opposed to the rite of animal sacrifice and had attempted to abolish it.⁵ This interpretation of the Gāthās, in fact, was instrumental in the creation of an image of ancient Zoroastrianism as a wholly spiritual ethical religion.⁶ Zarathustra was seen as an anti-ritualistic theologian, who opposed the rites of animal sacrifice and the pressing of Haoma (a plant pressed to produce an intoxicating substance) and replaced them by rituals consisting of prayers, contemplation and the feeding of the sacred flame.⁷ Since it is undisputed that animal sacrifice and the pressing of Haoma were among the core rituals of Zoroastrianism shortly after the days of the prophet,⁸ scholars believed that he was unsuccessful in his ritual reforms; this produced the image of Zoroastrianism as the product of the reintroduction of pagan practices into the reformed tradition. The immediate followers of Zarathustra could not meet the stern ethical and spiritual demands he had made of them, but quickly lapsed into their half-pagan customs.

Modern scholarship has not left much of these reconstructions uncontested.⁹ The "spiritual" focus of earlier scholarship (warmly embraced by leading Parsi intellectuals) was very much a product of its age, but has by now been abandoned by all but a few.¹⁰ Subsequent

⁵ Cf., for instance, H. Lommel, "War Zarathustra ein Bauer?," *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 58 (1931) 248-265; an overview of early interpretations of Zarathustra's life and message is given by K. Rudolph, "Zarathustra—Priester und Prophet," *Numen* 8 (1961) 81-116.

⁶ Critically discussed in the first part of M. Molé, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l'Iran ancien. Le problème zoroastrien et la tradition mazdéenne* (Annales du Musée Guimet, Bibliothèque d'études 69; Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963).

⁷ Most brilliantly reconstructed by H. Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras nach dem Avesta dargestellt* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1930).

⁸ Evidence for this comes mainly from the *Yashts*, traditional hymns to individual deities, which will be discussed briefly below.

⁹ Cf. particularly the works by Boyce and Molé mentioned above and the overview in H. Humbach, "Zarathustra und die Rinderschlachtung," in: B. Benzing, O. Böcher and G. Mayer, eds., *Wort und Wirklichkeit. Studien zur Afrikanistik und Orientalistik* (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Haim, 1977) vol. 2, 17-29.

¹⁰ The main exception being Gh. Gnoli, *Zoroaster's Time and Homeland. A Study on the Origins of Mazdeism and Related Problems* (Istituto Universitario Orientale. Seminario di studi asiatici. Series Minor 7; Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1980) 150-152 et passim.

scholarship has both uncovered the ideological (liberal Western European) nature of this approach and improved greatly on the understanding of the actual texts. The earliest Zoroastrian texts are so difficult to interpret that there can be no certainty in this field, but most specialists currently believe that the Gāthās are, first and foremost, ritual texts and that ritual (including animal sacrifice) was one of the main triggers for Zarathustra's novel views on religious truth.¹¹ However one interprets the difficult Gathic passages, there is no reason to interpret the existence of the rite of animal sacrifice in Zoroastrianism as a betrayal of the message of the prophet, if message there was.

If we leave aside the problematic Gāthās, the situation becomes much clearer: the sacrifice of animals is presented and, so one is led to believe, experienced as a normal part of religious life. It is likely, in view of the great historical depth of Zoroastrian texts, that the meaning and interpretation of the rite of animal sacrifice changed with the development of the Zoroastrian tradition, but such changes are difficult to document. In the case of Zoroastrianism, the difficulties in tracing such developments are greater than in the case of other ancient religions, because of the significant lacunae in documentation. This also holds for synchronic layerings: priestly, royal and lay perceptions of rituals and doctrines,¹² and for internal variations in, for instance, Sasanian Zoroastrianism. To take an example, there are some traces of the advocacy of vegetarianism in certain Zoroastrian traditions and, consequently, there must have been Zoroastrians in the Sasanian period who rejected the tradition of animal sacrifice altogether, but we cannot grasp them historically.¹³

To remedy the many uncertainties in the field, two strategies have been commonly adopted. Some scholars, particularly those working on the earlier layers of Zoroastrianism, view the Zoroastrian practice in comparison with the rich materials from Vedic India, with

¹¹ Boyce, *History* I, 214–216; J. Kellens & E. Pirart, *Les textes vieil-avestiques* I (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1988), 32–36; H. Humbach, *The Gāthās of Zarathustra and the Other Old Avestan Texts* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1991) 67–94.

¹² For the diachronic and synchronic layerings of Zoroastrian traditions, cf. A. de Jong, "Purification in absentia: On the Development of Zoroastrian Ritual Practice," in J. Assmann and G.G. Stroumsa, eds., *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 301–329.

¹³ Cf. S. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation. Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994) 43–44.

which Zoroastrianism shares a common ancestry.¹⁴ Both on a lexical and grammatical level and, it seems, with regard to certain basic conceptions of animal sacrifice, the two traditions show remarkable similarities.¹⁵ Such a comparison can therefore yield important information on possible meanings of the rite in either tradition. There are also significant and undeniable differences: Vedic religion is, in all senses of the expression, a sacrificial religion: sacrifice is at the core of the tradition and forms the basis of virtually all speculation.¹⁶ This does not apply to Zoroastrianism in any of its expressions, with the possible but inconclusive exception of the Gāthās.

The alternative to this comparative approach is the study of Zoroastrian traditions as they unfold on the basis of the earlier texts. This approach is mainly productive for those working on the later periods of Zoroastrian history, for it presupposes the existence of an early layer of tradition (laid down in the Gāthās and the Younger Avesta), beyond which historical research cannot reach.¹⁷ Ideally, the two approaches are used in combination, but for the specific subject of animal sacrifice this has proven to be extremely difficult.¹⁸ In the present contribution, we shall limit ourselves to the second approach to explore the meanings of sacrifice in the development of the Zoroastrian tradition.

2. Early outside witnesses

The earliest datable references to sacrifice in Iranian religious traditions come from two sources: Greek descriptions of the religion of

¹⁴ For an introduction, cf. J.C. Heesterman, *The Broken World of Sacrifice. An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

¹⁵ Elaborated by Kellens and Pirart, *Les textes vieil-avestiques* I, 3–36.

¹⁶ For recent careful explorations of the subject, cf. Heesterman, *Broken World* and S.W. Jamison, *The Ravenous Hyenas and the Wounded Sun. Myth and Ritual in Ancient India* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). The rituals associated with animal sacrifice (*paśubandha*) are amply described in R.N. Dandekar (ed.), *Śrautakośa* English Section I (Poona: Vaidika Samsodhana Mandala, 1962) 770–876; for quick reference, consult A.B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925) 324–326.

¹⁷ Good recent examples of such an approach are G. Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša in the Zoroastrian Tradition* (*Orientalia Rheno-Traiectina* 28; Leiden: Brill, 1985); A. Hintze, "The Rise of the Saviour in the Avesta," in C. Reck and P. Zieme, eds., *Iran und Turfan. Beiträge Berliner Wissenschaftler, Werner Sundermann zum 60. Geburtstag gewidmet* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 77–97.

¹⁸ The best attempt is Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism* I, 149–157.

the Persians and Elamite tablets from the Achaemenian administration in Persepolis in the period of Darius I. The evidence from the latter, however, tends to be inconclusive. The tablets mainly mention rations apportioned to priests and others for the performance of certain rituals; the rituals themselves are often named but it has not yet been possible to identify or interpret these terms with any confidence.¹⁹ In Greek descriptions of (mainly) royal Persian rituals, animal sacrifice is especially prominent, but this may have been conditioned by the interests of the Greek observers themselves.²⁰

Two texts stand out in importance: Herodotus, *Histories* 1.132 and Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.13.–15.²¹ Herodotus, our earliest witness, describes a lay sacrifice, initiated and performed by a Persian on his own wish, in order to honour the god of his liking. A priest (a Magus) is present, but only to sing an invocation to the gods. Herodotus' description of the sacrifice shows so many lacunae that it is difficult to evaluate accurately. The opposite is true of Strabo's account, which is highly detailed and of the greatest importance for the history of Zoroastrian rituals.

Strabo was born in Amaseia around 63 BCE and died around 23 CE. His family had lived in Pontus for several generations and had entertained close contacts with the Graeco-Iranian Mithradatic dynasty. These contacts were severed for reasons of political expediency when the family established relations with the Romans in the person of Lucullus. When Lucullus was ousted by Pompey, the family's prestige and influence suffered accordingly. Strabo, who had been educated in Nyssa, travelled through large parts of the ancient world, from Armenia to the West and from Pontus to Ethiopia. He never went to Persia proper, but he had intimate knowledge of Iranian culture in the diaspora, and of the mix of Greek, Armenian and Iranian cultures that dominated the Eastern half of Anatolia for several centuries. He is one of the few Greek authors to transmit first-hand information on Zoroastrianism as a living faith, among the diaspora communities of Cappadocia and Eastern Anatolia. In his

¹⁹ H. Koch, *Die religiösen Verhältnisse der Dareios-Zeit. Untersuchungen an Hand der elamischen Persepolistafelchen* (Göttinger Orientforschungen, Rh. 3, Bd. 4; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977) 120–153. Cf. also M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism II: Under the Achaemenians* (Handbuch der Orientalistik 1.8.2.2.2A.2; Leiden: Brill, 1982) 132–149.

²⁰ A brilliant *vue d'ensemble* is given by P. Briant, *Histoire de l'empire Persé. De Cyrus à Alexandre* (Paris: Fayard, 1996) 252–260.

²¹ For these texts, cf. De Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 76–156.

description of Zoroastrian rituals (*Geography* 15.3.13–15; he hardly mentions the beliefs of the Persians), Strabo writes the following:

13. [...] And they perform sacrifices after dedicatory prayers in a purified place, presenting the victim wreathed. And when the Magus, who directs the ceremony, has cut the meat to pieces, the people take them away and depart, leaving no portion for the gods. For they say that the god needs the soul of the victim and nothing else. And yet, according to some, they put a small piece of the omentum on the fire.

14. They bring sacrifices to fire and water in a different way. For fire, they place upon it dry pieces of wood without the bark and place soft fat upon it; then, they pour oil upon it and light it below, not blowing but fanning; they even kill those who do blow or put a corpse or filth upon the fire. But for water, they go to a lake or a river or a spring, dig a trench and sacrifice (the victim) over it, taking care that nothing of the water near by is soiled with the blood, because thus they will defile it. Then they arrange the pieces of meat on myrtle or laurel, the Magi touch it with slender wands and sing invocations, while pouring out a libation of oil with milk and honey, not into fire or water, but upon the ground. And they sing invocations for a long time, holding the bundle of slender tamarisk wands in their hand.

15. But in Cappadocia—for there the tribe of the Magi is large; they are also called fire-kindlers, and there are many sanctuaries of the Persian gods—they do not even sacrifice with a knife, but they beat (the animal to death) with a piece of wood as with a cudgel. [...]

Some details in this description are obscure. This is particularly true of the libation poured on the earth. The main elements of the ritual, however, are clearly recognizable and are important for filling some gaps in our documentation in the Iranian texts. It is to these that we turn now.

3. *The ritual as described in Zoroastrian texts*

With some notable exceptions, most animals could be offered in sacrifice. The most important exceptions are animals that were held to have been created by the Evil Spirit (the so-called *xrafstras*) and certain animals that were particularly sacred because of their great use in the battle against evil: the cockerel, the dog, the beaver and the hedgehog, for instance. The evil animals are a separate section of the animal kingdom created by the evil spirit in order to harm the good creation. Mainstream Zoroastrian ideas on cosmogony and cosmology involve a double creation in the second stage of creative

activity. First, Ahura Mazda created the universe and what is in it in a perfect, spiritual (*mēnōg*) state. This creation could not be attacked by the Evil Spirit (Angra Mainyu/Ahremen), but in order to make it possible to solve the conflict between the two spirits—the main reason for this creation to exist—Ahura Mazda transferred his initial creation into a material (*gētīg*) state, vulnerable to the activities of the Evil Spirit. Angra Mainyu immediately rushed to that creation and counter-created various sections in this universe, in order to make it more accessible to his destructive purposes. These creations include salt water, smoke, diseases and death, deserts, mountains and the evil animals (*xrafstra*). The *xrafstra*-category includes reptiles and insects, felines, wolves and other predators. Since these animals belong to Angra Mainyu, killing them is one of the greatest virtues anyone can perform; in expiation of sins, certain numbers of *xrafstras* must be killed and people were supposed to have with them a whip-like instrument, called *xrafstrayma*-, “*xrafstra*-killer” in order to do so. Such animals, however, were not suitable to be offered in sacrifice to Ahura Mazda or any of the yazatas. They do have a “soul”, but in this case that soul is not held to be released or saved by killing the animal in a sacrificial setting, as is the case with the “good” animals.²² Offering such an animal in sacrifice is considered to be “devil-worship”, the opposite of what is required of man. Descriptions of such devilish rites usually focus on the wolf as the animal to be sacrificed, just as descriptions of good sacrifices usually mention the cow as the sacrificial animal *par excellence*.²³

Among the beneficent animals, the cockerel is often explicitly excluded from sacrifice.²⁴ The bird is sacred to the god Sraoša and its call in the morning chases the demons away. Likewise, sacrificing a dog seems to have been unimaginable: the animal was considered particularly holy and indispensable in the battle against pollution. It

²² For the soul of the *xrafstras*, cf. *Andarz ī wehdēnān ō māzdēsnān* in J.M. Jamasp-Asana, *Pahlavi Texts* (Bombay, 1897) 123.3 ff: “Who created the soul (*gyān*) in the *xrafstars*? He said: ‘Ōhrmazd.’”

²³ Cf. *Nērangestān* 59 (in A. Waag, *Nirangistan. Der Awestatraktat über die rituellen Vorschriften* (Iranische Forschungen 2; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1941): “One satisfies the *Ratus* with the body of a she-wolf and her milk among all the devil-worshippers and those whose bodies are forfeit [. . .].” This *topos* probably led to the description of actual sacrifices of a wolf in Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 46; cf. De Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 177–180.

²⁴ Cf. in particular *PhlRDd.* 58.81.

shares its anti-demonic qualities with the beaver and the hedgehog, all animals that were not eaten and not sacrificed.

Theoretically, at least, all other animals could be offered in sacrifice. Some, of course, never were because they were not caught to be eaten. In some texts, the range of animals suitable for sacrifice is restricted to domesticated animals and all fish and birds (with the exception of the cockerel and birds not eaten, such as vultures). Wild animals, that is to say those animals caught in the hunt, are a problematic category. Since all sacrificial rites we hear of in the texts mention the killing of the animal (with a cudgel and a knife), whether as part of the ritual or preceding it (both varieties are attested),²⁵ it is unclear how wild animals would qualify for the ritual. In *PhlRDd.* 58.78–80,²⁶ a distinction is made between tame animals (killed with cudgel and knife) and wild animals (killed with bow and arrow). The latter (the example given is the "mountain cow" (*gāw ī kōftīg*)²⁷ can also be captured and domesticated; if they are, the rules that apply to them are identical to the rules applying to tame animals. This suggests that the meat of animals killed during the hunt had a separate status, because it did not derive from animals killed in a ritual setting.²⁸

A further problem arises with several lists of animals that should not be killed or eaten that appear in Pahlavi texts.²⁹ These have sometimes been interpreted as giving rules on animals not suitable for

²⁵ M. Boyce, "Haoma, Priest of the Sacrifice," in M. Boyce and I. Gershevitch, eds., *W.B. Henning Memorial Volume* (London: Lund Humphries, 1970) 62–80, p. 68.

²⁶ For this text, cf. A.V. Williams, *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* (Det Kongelige Danske Videnskaberne Selskab, Historisk-Filosofiske Meddelelser 60; København: Munksgaard, 1989) ad loc. Cf. also K.M. Jamasp-Asa, 'On the *drōn* in Zoroastrianism' in *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce* (Acta Iranica 24; Leiden: Brill, 1985) 335–356.

²⁷ According to Ph. Gignoux, "Dietary Laws in Pre-Islamic and Post-Sasanian Iran," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994) 16–42, a mouflon.

²⁸ For hunting and its benefits according to Iranian traditions, cf. Ph. Gignoux, "La chasse dans l'Iran sasanide," in Gh. Gnoli, ed., *Orientalia Romana 5. Iranian Studies* (Serie Orientale Roma 52; Roma: Istituto Italiano per il medio ed estremo Oriente, 1983) 101–118.

²⁹ An overview is given by Gignoux, "Dietary Laws." J.C. Tavadia announced in *Šāyest-nē-šāyest. A Pahlavi Text on Religious Customs* (Alt- und Neu-Indische Studien 3; Hamburg: Friedrichsen, De Gruyter, 1930) 130 an article on "Lawful and Unlawful Animal Food According to Iranian Writers," but this unfortunately did not appear as announced in the Pavry *Festschrift*.

sacrificial rituals, but their exact status is unclear. They proscribe, for instance, the killing of the pig and the eating of pork under certain conditions.³⁰ An Avestan fragment in the *Nērangestān*, however, seems to indicate precisely the opposite, by listing the pig (strangely enough along with various young animals) as an animal "to be sacrificed during the ritual for the gods" (*pad yazišn ī yazadān kušišn*).³¹ Similarly, various forbidden animals listed in *ŠnŠ* 10.9 appear as choice meats in the description of royal cuisine in the court romance *King Khusrāw and his Page*.³²

If the animal species suitable for sacrifice are not unequivocally specified, other rules are clear. Both male and female animals could be offered in sacrifice.³³ Young animals were not suitable. This rule, one of the most often repeated prescriptions, is in accordance with similar rules concerning fruits and vegetables: these could only be picked or harvested when they were ripe.³⁴ Lambs, kids, calves and colts were, consequently, not considered admissible sacrificial animals. At the other end of the age spectre, animals that were too old were not admissible either.³⁵

If female, the animal should not be with young and should not be suckling its young. All animals should be intact (i.e. not missing certain body parts), healthy and strong. Lean, sickly and wounded animals were not suitable.³⁶ The animal obviously also had to be alive at the moment of sacrifice. A final restriction appears to have been one of quantity: it was considered best to kill as small a number of animals as possible in order to feed the congregation.³⁷

³⁰ Gignoux, "Dietary Laws," 20; 29.

³¹ H. Hoffmann, "Drei indogermanische Tiernamen in einem Avesta-Fragment," *Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft* 22 (1967) 29–38. The fragment occurs in *N.* 58 (Waag) with a parallel in *PhlRDd.* 58.83.

³² For which, cf. D. Monchi-Zadeh, "Xusrōv i Kavātān ut rētak. Pahlavi Text, Transcription and Translation," in *Monumentum Georg Morgenstierne II* (Acta Iranica 22; Leiden: Brill, 1983) 47–91.

³³ Gignoux, "Dietary Laws," 17, suggests that only male animals were suitable, but this is flatly contradicted by certain rules applying only to female animals (e.g. those proscribing the slaughter of animals with young) and by the fact that the Avestan parts of the *Nērangestān* refer to the sacrificial animals with feminine forms only.

³⁴ Evident, for instance, from the *Irani Patita*, a late confession of sins, which includes the confession that "I have cut down young wood and trees and picked unripe fruits and vegetables." For the text, cf. E.K. Antiā, *Pāzend Texts* (Bombay: Trustees of the Parsee Punchāyet, 1909) 139.5–6.

³⁵ *N.* 54 (Waag) appears to proscribe the use of an animal that no longer has milk to give.

³⁶ *N.* 56.

³⁷ *PhlRDd.* 58.71, discussed by Boyce, "Haoma," 69–70 (and cf. below).

In certain cases, rules applied to the food the animal could have eaten. If one wanted to sacrifice a pig, which was thought to feed on *xrafstras*, it should have been fed on grass and vegetables for a year in order to qualify.³⁸ In the case of cows, neither their meat nor their milk could be used for ritual purposes if the owner found out that the animal had accidentally consumed carrion.³⁹

Some rules also applied to whoever provided the animal. The *Nērangestān* 54 (Waag) says that the animal should come from the personal possessions of the dedicant and his family, but may also be procured (by confiscation) from devil-worshippers and mortal sinners. In that case, the confiscation was only allowed, it seems, if the animal was indeed sacrificed.

After the selection and inspection of the animal, a priest dug a trench or a pit over which the animal was to be killed and constructed a separate mound of grass on which the pieces of meat were supposed to be placed. Both elements are mentioned by Strabo and the mound of grass also figures prominently in the oldest description of Persian animal sacrifice in Greek literature, Herodotus' *Histories* 1.132.⁴⁰ Both elements are also known from the *Nērangestān*: "[Placing] the rump toward the *zōt*, breast to the fire, dig a hole, put down a cushion without recitation. If no hole is dug the cushion will be damaged."⁴¹ This is the only passage in Zoroastrian literature to confirm the digging of a pit before the sacrifice and give its reason: to prevent the blood from defiling a sacred space; such is the case with the water in Strabo's description and with the "cushion" (*bālīs*) in the *Nērangestān*.

The pit presumably was dug to collect the waste products of the sacrifice: the inedible intestines of the animal and, possibly, its blood.⁴² The practice is well known from other Zoroastrian rules with regard

³⁸ Gignoux, "Dietary Laws," 20.

³⁹ *Vd.* 7.77 with commentary.

⁴⁰ For which, cf. De Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 110–119.

⁴¹ Pahlavi *Nērangestān* f. 128v, in: D.S. Flattery & M. Schwartz, *Haoma and Harmaline. The Botanical Identity of the Indo-Iranian Sacred Hallucinogen "Soma" and its Legacy in Religion, Language, and Middle Eastern Folklore* (University of California Publications: Near Eastern Studies 21; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989) 83, n. 14.

⁴² The status of the blood of the sacrificial animal is uncertain: in modern Irani Zoroastrian usage, the blood is collected in a bowl and prepared to be eaten (as a form of black pudding); since Islamic observance forbids the eating of blood, this is unlikely to be a recent innovation. The observance itself, however, is not known from any literary source. Cf. Boyce, "Mihragān," 111.

to impure substances. More than most other religions, Zoroastrianism has difficulties with the ways by which to dispose of impure substances (i.e. everything that leaves the body).⁴³ Since earth, water and fire are all sacred and polluting these elements must be avoided, simply throwing them on the earth, throwing them in water or burning them are no viable solutions. The solution prescribed throughout Zoroastrian literature is that of digging a hole and protecting the earth from being polluted by certain formulae, before and after the "burying" of the impure substances. This rule applies to the disposal of nail-clippings and hair as well as to urinating and defecating.⁴⁴ The hole that is dug is marked off by the drawing of furrows which prevent the impurity from spreading; the recitation of texts neutralizes the evil that attaches to the impure substances.

The animal was made to face the fire.⁴⁵ Its legs were bound together, a dedication was recited, dedicating the animal to Vohu Manah, Lord of Cattle, and the neck of the animal was broken with a log of wood, or at least the animal was stunned. Then, it was killed by slitting its throat with a knife. The sequence of activities at this stage of the sacrifice is perhaps best illustrated by a passage from the short poetic text *Draxt ī Asūring* 14–17. In this text, a Parthian-Middle Persian dispute between a Babylonian tree and a goat on the question who is the best, the tree addresses the goat thus:

They make ropes of me	which bind your legs.
They make clubs of me	which break your neck.
They make pegs of me	which hang you upside down.
I am fuel for the fires	which roast you terribly. ⁴⁶

The question of stunning the animal before killing it with a knife has attracted a lot of attention, both among non-Zoroastrians in antiquity and in modern scholarly literature.⁴⁷ In the *Questions of Bōxt-*

⁴³ For an introduction to the subject, cf. A.V. Williams, "Zoroastrian and Judaic Purity Laws. Reflections on the Viability of a Sociological Interpretation" in S. Shaked and A. Netzer, eds., *Irano-Judaica III* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1994) 72–89; further materials in J.K. Choksy, *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism. Triumph over Evil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989).

⁴⁴ Cf. also De Jong, "Purification in absentia."

⁴⁵ Boyce, "Haoma," 68 with n. 57.

⁴⁶ Translated by C.J. Brunner, "The Fable of *The Babylonian Tree*," *JNES* 39 (1980), 191–202; 291–302, ad loc.

⁴⁷ The fundamental study is E. Benveniste, "Sur la terminologie iranienne du sacrifice," *JAI* 252 (1964) 45–58.

Mahrē, part of the fifth book of the *Dēnkard*, we find this aspect of the ritual as one of the items in the discussion between a Christian and a Zoroastrian high priest.⁴⁸ The question asked is: "What is the reason that the sacrificial animal is struck with the wood before the knife?" (*gōspand pad kuštan pēš az kārd cōb zadan cim*) and this is the answer:

The reason for striking cattle with a log before (applying) the knife, together with the other things which are to be done in that matter, apart from the ritual efficacy of cleansing the body from a number of demons, especially the portion of excrement and bad taste, and (apart from) preventing the unjust and ill-considered slaughter of cattle, is first pity for the beast and on this account the lessening of its fear and pain when the knife is applied to it, and its prevention of the slaughter of cattle in an ill-considered manner, impulsively and at any time when one's desire is urgent.⁴⁹

This particular aspect of the Zoroastrian ritual is also known to us from two unexpected traditions. The Mandaeans, who sacrifice animals with a knife, do so only while holding a piece of wood, undoubtedly under the influence of Zoroastrian practices.⁵⁰ It has long been known that Mandaean ritual terminology and practice was heavily influenced by Zoroastrianism.⁵¹ The piece of wood, incidentally, is *not* used in the sacrifice, but it is mandatory that it be held.

The practice of stunning the animal before killing it is also known from Armenian literature, where the Iranian loan-word *yaz-el* (from the root *yaz-*, "to sacrifice") came to be used to indicate precisely this way of sacrificing. Eating meat from an animal killed in the Zoroastrian way was considered proof of (re-)conversion.⁵² In Syriac,

⁴⁸ For the background of these questions, cf. A. de Jong, "Zoroastrian Self-Definition in Contact with Other Faiths," in S. Shaked and A. Netzer, eds., *Irano-Judaica* 5 [forthc.]. For a translation of the text, cf. M.F. Kanga, "Pursišnihā ī Bōxt-Mārā ut-šān passox'thā. A Pahlavi Text," *Indian Linguistics* 25 (1964-1965; *Baburam Saksena Felicitation Volume*) 3-20.

⁴⁹ Translated by R.C. Zaehner, *Zurvan. A Zoroastrian Dilemma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955) 52.

⁵⁰ K. Rudolph, *Die Mandäer II. Der Kult* (FRLANT NF 57; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961) 297; E.S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937) 49-50.

⁵¹ Cf. Ş. Gündüz, *The Knowledge of Life. The Origins and Early History of the Mandaeans and their Relation to the Sabians of the Qur'an and to the Harranians* (JSS Supplement 3; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 79-83.

⁵² Benveniste, "Terminologie," 51-53; J.R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Harvard Iranian Series 5; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Department of Near Eastern

too, the practice has been recorded.⁵³ The controversy over the eating of meat from sacrificial animals will be discussed below.

The description in the *Draxt ī Asūrīg* also omits some essential elements: the animal was bound and stunned and hung from wooden pegs, after which it was flayed and dissected.⁵⁴ The roasting of the animal could also be replaced by cooking the meat in a cauldron, as witnessed by Herodotus and observed among modern Irani Zoroastrians.⁵⁵ Raw meat, at any rate, was not allowed (*N.* 57). The inedible innards were probably buried in the pit and the skins were prepared and could be offered (separately) as part of the ritual. We do not know much about the treatment of the meat, apart from the fact that it was cut to pieces and roasted or cooked. One thing, however, is essential: some parts of the head (or the entire head) were kept aside, because they were consecrated to the god Haoma. We find this prescription already in the Avesta: the two jaw-bones, the tongue and the left eye are the share of Haoma (*Y.* 11.4–7). Apart from being the god of the plant Haoma (one of the essential elements of Zoroastrian ritual), Haoma is also known as the divine priest and, as such, receives a fixed portion.⁵⁶

The consecration of the head, and more particularly of the tongue, of the animal is one of the very few elements of the ritual that have been attested throughout the history of Zoroastrianism. A special ritual, in which a flat cake (*drōn*) was offered with the tongue was part of the sacrificial rites. The only exception occurs when birds or fish are offered as sacrificial animals; these animals were not dedicated to Haoma but to the god Gōš, the “soul of the bull,” who looks after animal welfare.

In all Zoroastrian rituals, the dedication takes place by reciting the appropriate words and by a ritual tasting (*cāšnē*) by the priest. Generally, there are the *drōn*, prepared Haoma and representations of vegetal and animal life (the latter known as *gōšūdāg*, cf. above). During the ritual, the priest tastes some of it and afterwards the rest

Languages and Civilizations; National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, 1987) 491–494.

⁵³ Cf. the evidence from Mār Barhad-bešabba in J. Bidez & F. Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1937) vol. 2, 100–101.

⁵⁴ *SupplTxiŠnŠ* 11.4–11.6.

⁵⁵ Boyce, *Stronghold*, 246.

⁵⁶ Brilliantly studied by Boyce, “Haoma,” *passim*.

of the *gōšūdāg* as well as the share of Haoma (the consecrated tongue, which the priest may not taste) is given to a dog, one of the most sacred animals in Zoroastrianism.

What is striking in Zoroastrian rites of animal sacrifice is the fact that almost all of the meat is of no consequence to the ritual. Apart from the tongue, some of the fat, which is given to the fire, and the piece of meat near the *drōn*, the meat is of no consequence.⁵⁷ The priest gets his share and the rest is either consumed by those present or is shared and taken away. The sharing of the meat was considered a sacred duty, and failing to comply with it is condemned in strong terms in Y. 11.1.

4. *Controversies over Zoroastrian sacrifices*

Like systems of purity and pollution, the rites of sacrifice can produce and uphold boundaries between religious groups. In the cultural mix of Sasanian Babylonia and Iran, virtually all religious communities banned the eating of meat from animals killed by "others." This is true of Jews, Zoroastrians, Mandaeans and Christians in various degrees of rigidity. The Zoroastrian legislation on the subject, however, is not very clear. One often finds bans on killing animals "not in accordance with the law" (*adādīhā*), something which Jews and Christians were said to do, but the laws in question are rarely specified. One can reasonably guess that the fact that Jews were thought to kill young animals constituted illegal ways of taking animal life.⁵⁸

Zoroastrian sources frequently mention the fact that it is not allowed to buy meat from non-Zoroastrians, or to sell meat to them, but such a prescription is part of a larger set of rules against exchanging food commodities of various types and the ban on buying them from unbelievers is connected with their failure to observe the purity

⁵⁷ On the *omentum*-offering mentioned by Strabo, cf. De Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 132-133, with references to parallels in Indian and Zoroastrian literature and in modern practice.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Dk.* 3.288.9: "One, <against that which Yima> counselled not to kill cattle before they reach maturity, Dahāg taught to kill cattle freely, according to the custom of the Jews." Translated and discussed by S. Shaked, "Zoroastrian Polemics against Jews in the Sasanian and Early Islamic Period," in S. Shaked and A. Netzer, eds., *Irano-Judaica II* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1990) 85-104.

rules and not specifically related to sensitivities in the area of animal sacrifice.

Such sensitivities are known, however, from the opposing sides: the best known and most interesting case is the charge, brought forward in martyrologies, that Christians were required by their Zoroastrian persecutors to "eat blood."⁵⁹ The most likely interpretation of these charges is connected with the Zoroastrian practice of sacrifice, which seems to be designed to keep the blood in the animal for as long as possible; animals were bled, eventually, but no particular importance attached to the bleeding of the animal, which must have been unacceptable to Jews, but here appears to have been unacceptable to Christians, too. From Armenian literature we also find reports on the fact that re-converted Zoroastrians were required to eat meat from a sacrificed animal, which apparently constituted proof of true (re-)conversion.⁶⁰

5. *Interpretations of sacrifice: the sacrifice as a gift to the gods*

To the question why the ritual of animal sacrifice is important or necessary, the obvious answer in the texts would be: "for the sake of the soul."⁶¹ But the meaning or interpretation of the sacrifice has taken different directions, stressing either the nature of the ritual as a pleasing gift to the gods or as the only legitimate way of procuring meat. It is to these interpretations that we must turn now.

The first interpretation, which focuses on the commerce between mortals and gods, is in all likelihood the oldest tradition. It is similar to ideas on sacrifice in the religion of Vedic India, which shares a common ancestry with Zoroastrianism. It is also most explicitly present in the Avesta, the oldest layer of Zoroastrian literature, and more particularly in the *Yas̥ts*, hymns to the individual divinities.⁶² In these hymns, the gods are praised and invoked. One often finds

⁵⁹ Some texts have been collected and discussed by Gignoux, "Dietary Laws," 21–22.

⁶⁰ Benveniste, "Terminologie," 53.

⁶¹ Cf. S. Shaked, "For the Sake of the Soul: A Zoroastrian Idea in Transmission to Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990) 15–32.

⁶² For the *Yas̥ts*, cf. H. Lommel, *Die Yas̥ts des Avesta* (Quellen der Religionsgeschichte 15; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1927); P.O. Skjaervo, "Hymnic Composition in the Avesta," *Die Sprache* 36.2 (1994) 199–243.

in them a catalogue of divine and heroic worshippers, describing sacrifices performed in honour of the deity to whom the hymn is addressed. These passages are highly formulaic. A typical example from the hymn to Anahita, a popular river goddess and goddess of fertility, is:

The brave, powerful Kavi Usan sacrificed to her (Anāhitā) on Mount Erezifya a hundred stallions, a thousand cows and ten-thousand sheep. Then he asked her: 'Good strong Aredvī Sūrā Anāhitā, grant me this favour, that I may become the supreme ruler over all lands, over *daēvas* and men, over sorcerers and witches, over petty rulers, *kavis* and *karpans*. Aredvī Sūrā Anāhitā granted him that favour, to him who brought her libations, who worshipped her and brought her sacrifices. (Yt. 5.45-47)

The majority of passages in which sacrifices are performed follow this pattern. A markedly different formula is used in the case of priestly and divine worshippers, Zarathustra and Ahura Mazdā, for instance, who do not take animal life, but engage in the typically priestly Haoma-libations and sacred words.⁶³ A further difference can be observed in those passages where evil mythical persons perform the sacrifice: they can kill as many animals as the good persons do, but their wishes are never granted.

The incredible number of animals killed in these texts are due, no doubt, to epic exaggeration, but the species offered (horses, cows and sheep) were certainly all offered once, even though there does not seem to be direct evidence for horse sacrifice.⁶⁴

The ideas underlying this interpretation of sacrifice are reasonably clear: an individual turns to a specific deity in order to please him or her and obtain merit or a specific favour in return. The deity is offered the sacrifice, invited to partake of it and is supposed to do something in return. This is also very much the interpretation suggested by Herodotus and other Greek authors.

There are some traces of an even older conception of sacrifice in the Avesta: that according to which the gods were actually in need

⁶³ Yt. 5.17-19; 5.104-106, for example. Cf. also A. Panaino, "An Aspect of Sacrifice in the Avesta," *East and West* 36 (1986) 271-274.

⁶⁴ It is mentioned in several places in Greek literature, but there it may owe more than a little to Greek ideas on sacrifice. Cf. in particular Appian, *Mithridateia* 70, with De Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 361-362.

of those sacrifices. This is a well known idea from Vedic India, but only poorly attested in the Avesta. The only straightforward example is from the hymn to Tištrya (Yt. 8), the star Sirius, bringer of rain, with a parallel passage in the hymn to Verethraghna (Yt. 14), the god of victory.⁶⁵ In the hymn to Tištrya, we read that the calamities coming over the Aryan nations (the "we" of these texts) are due to the fact that Tištrya did not receive enough sacrifices. The solution to these problems is given by Ahura Mazdā himself: "Then Ahura Mazdā answered: 'Let the Aryan nations bring libations unto him; let the Aryan nations spread the *baresman* for him; let the Aryan nations cook a sheep for him, either white or black or of any colour, but of one colour.'" (Yt. 8.58). Ahura Mazdā adds that if a wicked, non-Iranian person is allowed to partake of this sacrifice, it is void and the calamities will not be averted (Yt. 8.59–61).

In this passage, the idea is clearly expressed that the gods were thought to be strengthened by the sacrifice. This conception, however, is rare because in Zoroastrian literature, the main idea has always been that prayer, worship and belief strengthen the good gods in their fight against evil.

These are some early examples of the understanding of sacrifice as a commerce between mortals and gods, the typical expression of which is the invitation to a meal. A significant aspect for the development of Zoroastrianism seems to be the stress on the morality of the dedicant, upon which (and not upon the correct procedure) the acceptability of the offering depends.

Although it is not commonly found in Zoroastrian literature, there can be little doubt that this continued to be the way in which most Zoroastrians understood the rites of animal sacrifice: as a personal gift to a divinity in order to acquire spiritual merit or to obtain a certain goal. As such it is usually presented in Greek literature on the religion of the Persians, where we find many descriptions of (mainly) royal sacrifices, carefully chosen and dedicated to specific divinities by the Magi, the Zoroastrian priests.⁶⁶

Further confirmation of the continuing prominence of this interpretation of sacrifice comes from the inscriptions of the Sasanian king Šāpūr I (r. 242–272 CE). In his monumental trilingual inscrip-

⁶⁵ Cf. A. Panaino, *Tištrya. Part I: The Avestan Hymn to Sirius* (Serie Orientale Roma 8.1; Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1990).

⁶⁶ De Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 357–362.

tion on the Ka'beh-ye Zartušt (ŠKZ),⁶⁷ this Sasanian monarch specifies the number of sheep to be killed on a daily basis for the sake of his soul and for the sake of the souls of various relatives.⁶⁸ There is no reason to doubt that these sacrifices were actually performed and they entailed the killing of thousands of sheep on a yearly basis.

6. *Animal sacrifice from a priestly perspective*

This conception of sacrifice is rarely attested in the priestly Pahlavi writings (to be dated collectively in the ninth and tenth centuries CE, but containing materials that are much older). These writings often focus more on the technicalities of the sacrifice, describing with great care which texts are to be recited when. Some of these texts, in particular the *Nērangestān*, a treatise on ritual, were used more or less as manuals for practising priests.⁶⁹ Wherever we find something about the underlying ideas, the focus is more on compassion with the animal and the deeply felt theological problem of taking life, in a tradition where this is an action usually ascribed to the Evil Spirit.⁷⁰

Before evil entered the world, there was no death. The first animal to be killed was the Uniquely Created Bull (*gāw ī ēk-dād*) and it was killed by Ahreman, the Evil Spirit, in his attempt to destroy the good creation. As an unexpected salutary effect of this first act of violence, a variety of plant and animal life came into being and the progression of life began. This progression of life is a vital part of the struggle against evil, which is the only reason for this world to exist.⁷¹ Death, in other words, is what Ahreman does to people, animals and plants. It is one of his countercreations to the life created by Ahura Mazdā. There is no escaping the reality that in order to

⁶⁷ For the text, cf. M. Back, *Die sassanidischen Staatsinschriften* (Acta Iranica 18; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 284–371.

⁶⁸ The passages in question are to be found in Back, *Sassanidischen Staatsinschriften*, 336–368.

⁶⁹ For the nature of the *Nērangestān*, cf. F.M. Kotwal & Ph.G. Kreyenbroek, *The Hērbedestān and Nērangestān II: Nērangestān. Fragard I* (Studia Iranica Cahier 16; Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 1995) 13–14.

⁷⁰ This interpretation of the ritual has been carefully explored in the works by Mary Boyce referred to above.

⁷¹ The most extensive version of this aspect of the cosmogony is found in *Greater Bundahišn* 4.21–4A6, for which cf. B.T. Anklesaria, *Žand-ākāsīh. Iranian or Greater Bundahišn* (Bombay: Rahnumae Mazdayasnan Sabha, 1956) ad loc.

sacrifice an animal, or in order to eat meat, one has to kill it. In a sense, this act imitates the behaviour of the Evil Spirit and is, therefore, potentially harmful to the good creation. Much of the priestly speculations is connected with this theological problem.

There are several aspects that are important here. First of all, there are priestly, divine and heroic examples of sacrifices offered to further the cause of good. The renovation of the world, which will bring about the final defeat of the powers of evil and the cleansing of creation, will be inaugurated by the performance of several rituals by Ahura Mazda himself, and by the Redeemer (Saošyant) and his associates; one of these rituals will be the killing of a bull, the fat of which mixed with White Hom will produce the draught of immortality for the resurrection of the dead.⁷² A famous first sacrifice is also attributed to the first human couple, Mašyā and Mašyāna, but this sacrifice was not performed according to any acceptable rule (it included tossing meat into the fire and into the air) and they were severely punished for it.⁷³ These examples do show, however, that the concept of animal sacrifice could be construed in terms of the emulation of divine or heroic examples, rather than an imitation of the activities of the Evil Spirit.

At an unknown point in time, but presumably quite early, the taking of animal life came to be restricted to a sacrificial context. The only permissible way to kill beneficent animals was to offer them up in sacrifice. Any other way of killing them was equated with a sin known as *būdyōzadīh*, "destroying existence/conscience." The basic idea is that killing the animal in the course of sacrifice releases its consciousness, soul, or spirit, which can then rise up to be collected and taken care of by the god "Soul of the Bull" (Geuš Urvan, Gōš). Killing it any other way equals destroying the animal, which is a serious sin.

We have seen above that this rule does not apply to "evil creatures" (*xrafstra*), the killing of which is instantly meritorious, and may not have applied to wild animals either. For the latter subject, the evidence is too limited to decide either way, but it is true to say

⁷² *Greater Bundahišn* 34.22–23.

⁷³ *GBd.* 14.21–22. This is a very difficult passage. For an interpretation, cf. A. de Jong, "Shadow and Resurrection," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, N.S. 9 (1995) 215–224, pp. 216–217 with references.

that most of the rules given for sacrifice seem to presuppose domesticated animals and, therefore, exclude discussions of exceptional cases, such as animals caught during the hunt.

The interpretation of sacrifice as the legal way to obtain meat gives the impression of a secondary rationalisation, mainly because of its absence in the early layers of the tradition. The idea of releasing the animal's soul, however, is known from early texts. In an Avestan fragment preserved in the late catechetical text *Parsišnīhā* ("Questions") we find the following ritual exclamation: "We send forth, O beneficent, good-giving bull, thy conscience and soul among the nearest created lights, the sight of the eyes of men."⁷⁴

Later texts not only stress the fact that killing animals in sacrifice saves their souls, but also limits their suffering to the required minimum. This, too, is based on earlier ideas, for instance on the prescription that the killing is done quickly.⁷⁵ The number of animals killed should be limited as much as possible⁷⁶ and the stunning of the animal was considered an act of compassion. Sacrificers, moreover, should be fully aware of what they were going to do and of the necessity of killing the animal, both features that are stressed in the discussion of the clubbing of the animal. A philosophical adaptation of these rules is found in *Dk.* 3.388, where a distinction is made between "killing without consciousness" (*a-bōy zadan*) and "perfect killing" (*bowandag zadan*). The former amounts to killing at random and is found among sinners and demons, whereas in the case of the latter, the acceptance of the prescriptions of the religion leads to a way of taking life that does not endanger the soul.⁷⁷ The necessity of sharing the meat procured from the sacrificial animal is also evident from a number of texts. The cow, the prototype of the sacrificial animal, pronounces the following curse in *Y.* 11.1: "May you be without offspring and accompanied by disgrace, (you) who do not share me when I am cooked, but you, you fatten me for

⁷⁴ K.M. JamaspAsa and H. Humbach, *Parsišnīhā. A Zoroastrian Catechism* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1971) 52–53; cf. also J. Kellens, "Die Religion der Achämeniden," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 10 (1983) 107–123, p. 118.

⁷⁵ Boyce, "Haoma," 69–70, discussing the Avestan word *āsu.yasna-*, "swiftly sacrificing."

⁷⁶ *PhLRDd.* 58.71, discussed by Boyce, "Haoma," 71–72.

⁷⁷ Translation in P.J. de Menasce, *Le troisième livre du Denkart* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973) ad loc.

your wife, your son or your own belly."⁷⁸ The sharing of the meat was also commented upon by various Greek observers (see above).

Several limitations on sacrifice were also introduced on religious grounds: on days under the tutelage of Vohu Manah, lord of cattle, no sacrifices could be performed. The best known prescription in this context is the ban on eating meat during the first three days after the death of a relative. If this rule was not observed, it was feared that another member of the family would die soon.⁷⁹ Eating meat at any rate was an activity fraught with danger and, therefore, awareness of its consequences was always required. *Šad Dar-e Nasr* 23, for instance, warns its readers to abstain from sin after the eating of meat: if one sins after having eaten meat, the sins of the animal (which are unknown, but can be serious) are added to the stock of the eater.

Meat is a normal part of the human diet. According to the *Bundahišn*, mankind originally only took water, then plants, then milk and then, finally, meat and will give up consuming these in reversed order at the end of time (*GBd.* 34.1–2).⁸⁰ Their final consumption, however, the draught of immortality, will be made of all these substances. This perhaps illustrates the ambiguities inherent in the notion of sacrifice in Zoroastrianism: it is, in general, a joyful occasion, taking place in communal gatherings, accompanied by a shared meal, but it is at the same time a situation that instills a deep sense of distress, perhaps even guilt, in the minds of those willing to ponder its theological resonances.

⁷⁸ Most recently discussed by J. Josephson, *The Pahlavi Translation Technique as Illustrated by Hōm Yašt* (Studia Iranica Upsaliensia 2; Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 1997) ad loc.

⁷⁹ *SDN* 78.

⁸⁰ Discussed in De Jong, "Shadow and Resurrection," 216–218.