

III.

The academic dispute around the understanding of blood sacrifice

“Thus we find in sacrifice an especially awesome example of the conservatism of the holy act. If one were to succeed in illuminating its prehistory as well as to penetrate all the way to its original significance, it would be a great gain for Greek religious science as well as for the science of comparative religions.”³¹

“Since the birth of the comparative history of religions in the second half of the 19th century, attempts are being made to uncover the origins of sacrifice. Despite the fact that these attempts have brought us closer to an understanding of sacrifice, they have not been convincing.”³²

Among the very earliest representations of cultic killings of human beings we find cylinder-seals from the beginning of the Mesopotamian Bronze Age. Already in 1887, it was suggested that the Mesopotamian cylinder-seals (Ill. 4) represent priests accomplishing the tasks - which also constituted their *raison d'être* - of holy killing.³³ To this view it has been opposed that the figures represented on the cylinders were by no means human priests, but fighting gods, for which there existed representations beyond dispute.³⁴

The interpretation of the slaying scene as a duel of gods - as a “sacrificial fight”³⁵ - immediately raised the question how anyone could have come to the idea to represent a divinity as a slayer, additionally equipping it with a human- or animal shape, such as does not exist in reality.

The dispute over the existence of human sacrifice in ancient Mesopotamia was silenced at once when Sir Leonard Wooley uncovered in the winter of 1927/28 the so-called cemetery of Ur³⁶: “the burial ritual included human sacrifices; the number of

³¹ K. Meuli, «Griechische Opferbräuche» (1946), in: Idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, published by T. Geizer, Bd. II, Basel: Schwabe & Co., 1975, p. 907.

³² R. H. Faherty, «Sacrifice», in: *The New Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropedia*, Bd. 26, Chicago et al.: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1991, p. 791.

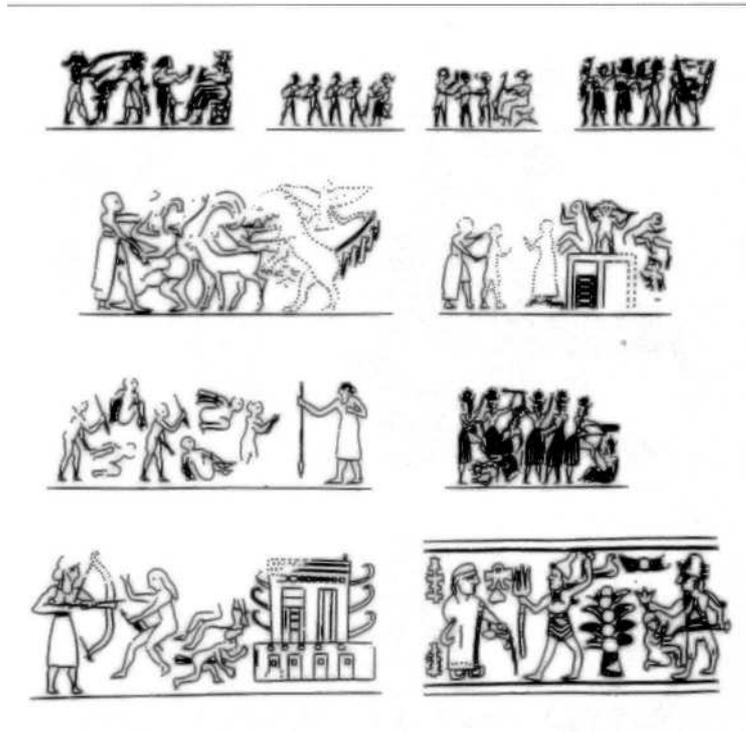
³³ See J. Menant, «Le sacrifice humain», in: *Recherches sur la Glyptique Orientale*, Bd. 1, 1887, p. 150ff.

³⁴ See W. H. Ward, «Human Sacrifice on Babylonian Seals», *American Journal of Archaeology*, 1889, Nr. 5, p. 34f.

³⁵ For this remarkably fitting formulation see C. Litterscheid (Hg.), *Aus der Welt der Azteken: Die Chronik des Fray Bernardino de Sahagün*, with an introduction by J. Rulfo, Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1989, p. 39.

³⁶ See L. Woolley, *Ur Excavations. Vol. II: The Royal Cemetery*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934; see also F. M. T. de Liagre Bohler, «Das Menschenopfer bei den alten Sumerern» (1929), in: Idem, *Opera*

victims could vary between half a dozen and seventy or eighty, but a certain number of human being had to accompany the owner of the grave.”³⁷ Also for the first high culture dynasty of Egypt sacrifices of followers are substantiated in Abydos and Saqqara.³⁸



Ill. 4: Early Bronze Age cylinders with scenes of human sacrifices.³⁹

Minora, Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1953.

³⁷ L. Woolley, *Ur «of the Chaldees». The Final Account: Excavations at Ur*, revised and updated by P. R. S. Moorey, London: The Herbert Press, 1982, p. 60.

³⁸ See J. G. Griffiths, «Menschenopfer», in: *Eexikon der Ägyptologie*, Band IV, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1982, Sp. 64.

³⁹ For all the seal except those below to the right, see. P. Amiet, *La glyptique Mesopotamienne archaïque*, Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Reserche Scientifique, 1980, passim; below to the right, see D. Collon, *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East*, London: British Museum Publications, 1987, p. 176.



Ill. 5: Mesopotamian representation of pursuing and slaying celestial gods.⁴⁰

Yet the archaeological evidence for human sacrifice was unable to solve the dispute regarding its meaning. The sacrifice of charioteers, of women and of servants could not be brought in resonance either with sacrificing priests or with slaying gods. The living beings committed to the grave belonged - even if in a somewhat over-dimensioned way - to the category of the offerings of gratitude for the prevention of vengeance, or for averting “bad times,” which could be construed as a higher form of vengeance. In the form of the offering of the first born offsprings of herd-animals, such gifts were also from earliest times connected with the act of killing. Yet this act of killing must by no means represent the necessary climax of a cultic action, but often

⁴⁰ See J. Black, A. Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary*, London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1992, p. 14 (at top), p. 119 (at bottom).

only it consists in relinquishing a good part of the prey - in hunting, for instance, the first animal of the kill, or a choice piece of it when butchering a domestic animal. Follower-sacrifices are therefore rituals to appease the fear of retribution, which seeks relief through offerings of gratitude. Human beings were killed in an entirely different manner from the figures on the cylinder seals, and often under sedation. And the fact that the seals do indeed represent true killings has no longer been disputed for the past two decades.⁴¹ Moreover, archaeological finds pointing to human sacrifice have also become available for the Near East area,⁴² the composition of which sacrifice seems to have been somewhat similar to the Cretan.⁴³ For ancient Egypt too, the situation has become indisputable.⁴⁴ There the ceremonial “slaying of enemies during a ritual” belongs to the religious givens. “Sacrilege such as grave robbers [could be] slain like sacrificial animals... in their stead.”⁴⁵

Still there reigns perplexity over the significance of these bloody acts. One begins to see that this “often erroneously judged phenomenon”⁴⁶ might have something

⁴¹ See A. R. W. Green, *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, Missoula/Montana: Scholars Press, 1975; against the very notion of blood sacrifice in Ancient Mesopotamia, in which he sees mere slaughter actions to provide nourishment for the gods, comes to word W. G. Lambert, «Donations of Food and Drink to the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia», in: J. Quaegebeur (pub.), *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the International Conference Organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to 20th of April 1991*, Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters & Department Orientalistiek Leuven, 1993, p. 191 ff.; he is contradicted, a. o. by H. Limet, «Le sacrifice **siskur**», in: J. Quaegebeur (Pub.), *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the International Conference Organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to 20th of April 1991*, Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters & Department Orientalistiek Leuven, 1993, p. 243 ff. as well as A. Finet, «Le sacrifice de l'âne en Mesopotamie», in: J. Quaegebeur (pub.), *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the International Conference Organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to 20th of April 1991*, Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters & Department Orientalistiek Leuven, 1993, p. 135 ff.

⁴² See J. B. Hennessy, «Thirteenth Century B. C. Temple of Human Sacrifice at Amman», in: *Studio Phoenicia III: Phoenicia and its Neighbours*, Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1985, p. 99 f.

⁴³ See Y. Sakellarakis, E. Sapouna-Sakellarakis, «Drama of Death in a Minoan Temple», in: *National Geographics*, Nr. 2 (Februar), 1981.

⁴⁴ See H. Willems, «Crime, Cult and Capital Punishment (Mo'alla Inscription 8)», in: *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Vol. 76, 1990, p. 27ff.

⁴⁵ E. Graefe, «Die Deutung der sogenannten <Opfergaben>», in: J. Quaegebeur (pub.), *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the International Conference Organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to 20th of April 1991*, Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters & Department Orientalistiek Leuven, 1993, p. 154.

⁴⁶ See M. M. Rind, *Menschenopfer: Vom Kult der Grausamkeit*, Regensburg: Universitätsverlag Regensburg, 1996, p. 8.

to do with the “myths of duels of gods and heroes, who defy and subdue dragons, monsters, demons and giants.”⁴⁷ As such legends and their accompanying iconography are reported from all over the world, and as the beneficial or destructive godheads emerge almost everywhere in human, animal, or mixed form, research tended to fall, unsurprisingly, for anthropological explanations. What appears everywhere with remarkable resemblance must needs be a generally human trait.

Despite the fact that elements such as the sun, moon and stars also provide a world-encompassing subject matter for imagery and lore, without being considered for this reason to be emanations of the soul, one branch of psychoanalytical research did not shrink from interpreting the myths - the *words* in the sense of *true* words - of cosmic dueling using its own analytical tools: “We can grasp the whole complex of the duel in all its forms as a conflict between Eros [the drive to live] and Thanatos [the drive to die]. It is this opposition, formulated for the first time by Sigmund Freud, between the desire to live and the desire to die, which provides all living organisms from the beginning with their central principle. It must be said that poets and philosophers had already in early times given it dramatic or metaphysical expression. But in real life these two - opposed - drives appear always in mixed form. To this extent, the *phantasies of myths* represent in a disguised form the fundamental truth of being human.”⁴⁸

Reducing myths and their corresponding sacrificial cults to mere phantasies over the opposition of love and hate proved itself a simplifying use of psychoanalysis, yet it had remarkable success. By now, the educated public may choose between several comprehensive systems of thought about the supposed universality and eternity of sacrifice driven by human aggression. The school of Walter Burkert,⁴⁹ for one, strives to recognize in the killing of sacrificial victims a reconversion of an aggressive drive⁵⁰ which could no longer be spent in hunting and big game hunting,⁵¹ this despite

⁴⁷ See J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (1959), Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1980, p. 9,1.

⁴⁸ J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (1959), Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1980, p. 3, 474, my emphasis.

⁴⁹ «Walter Burkerts Untersuchungen zur griechischen Religionsgeschichte bilden den seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg im deutschsprachigen Raum bei weitem wichtigsten Ansatz zum Verständnis des griechischen Mythos», writes Glenn W. Most 1990. Vgl. G. W. Most, «Strenge Erforschung wilder Ursprünge: Walter Burkert über Mythos und Ritus», in: W. Burkert, *Wilder Ursprung: Opferritual und Mythos bei den Griechen*, Berlin: Wagenbach, 1990, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Vgl. W. Burkert, «Griechische Tragödie und Opferritual», in: Idem, *Wilder Ursprung: Opferritual und Mythos bei den Griechen*, Berlin: Wagenbach, 1990, S. 24.

⁵¹ See W. Burkert, *Homo Necans: Interpretationen altgriechischer Opferriten und Mythen*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1972, passim.

the fact that hunting and blood sacrifice could well exist side by side in the same cultures. The hunting theory of sacrifice, which is also present in Egyptology,⁵² has been especially substantiated by Burkert's teacher Karl Meuli: "We are, to put it in a nut shell, convinced that the Olympic sacrifice is nothing else but a ritual butchering. The ceremonial of this butchering has its closest analogies in the butchering and sacrificing rites of Asiatic shepherd peoples; this rite itself harks back to hunting traditions... In the Olympic ritual, the Greeks have preserved a tribal inheritance from these prehistoric shepherds, and further on, from the hunting culture of primordial times."⁵³

Burkert, who considers that, together with Meuli, he has reached the end of his research path and who describes⁵⁴ its result of the "theory of sacrifice of Meuli/Burkert,"⁵⁵ warns specifically against reflecting about the occasion of the beginning of the great blood sacrifices. Even the reform movements which rose against the pursuit of these great cults in the Iron Age do not manage to bother the functionalistic credo in the eternity of sacrifice coming out of the most remote past: "Instead of asking what event could bring about a particular form of religion, we should ask why this religion was successful and was preserved... The community is bound together by the common experience of shock and guilt [over the holy killing]... So the sacrificial feasts are the traditional means to overcome all kinds of social crises."⁵⁶ That sacrifices "produced" community, because hate was redirected against some third party, had already been proposed by William Robertson Smith in the

⁵² See a. o. H. Altenmüller, «Opfer», in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Band IV, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1982, Sp. 580 as well as W. Helck, «Opfertier», in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Vol. IV, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1982, Sp. 594.

⁵³ K. Meuli, «Griechische Opferbräuche» (1946), in: Idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, publ. by T. Geizer, Bd. II, Basel: Schwabe & Co., 1975, p. 948.

⁵⁴ See W. Burkert, «Glaube und Verhalten: Zeichengehalt und Wirkungsmacht von Opferritualen», in: J. Rudhardt, O. Reverdin (Pub.), *Le Sacrifice dans L'Antiquite*, Geneve: Vandoeuvres, Foundation Hardt Pour l'Etude de L'Antiquite Classique, Entretiens, Tome XXVII, 1981, p. 109. See also R. G. Hammerton-Kelly, *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, Rene Girard, and Jona University Press*, 1986.

⁵⁵ For a critical view of «Meuli/Burkert» see G. S. Kirk, «Some Pitfalls in the Study of Ancient Greek Sacrifice (in Particular)», in: J. Rudhardt, O. Reverdin (pub.), *Le Sacrifice dans L'Antiquite*, Geneve: Vandoeuvres, Foundation Hardt Pour l'Etude de l'Antiquite Classique, Entretiens, Tome XXVII, 1981, p. 70 ff.

⁵⁶ W. Burkert, «Griechische Tragödie und Opferritual», in: Idem, *Wilder Ursprung: Opferritual und Mythos hei den Griechen*, Berlin: Wagenbach, 1990, p. 23/25.

preceding century.⁵⁷

René Girard can be considered another proponent of this perspective.⁵⁸ He presents himself not only as a scholar, but also as a healer and bringer of salvation, who strives to reactivate the sacrificing priest endowed with secret knowledge: “In order for violence to finally come to rest, to become empowered and to appear divine, the secret of its efficiency must remain intact, the mechanism of its consent must remain forever unknown. The religious fact [=sacrifice; G. H.] protects man as long as its secret is not revealed. If the monster is shoed out of its last hiding place, one faces the danger that it will become unchained once and forever. Whoever destroys the ignorance of men runs the risk of exposing them to a heightened danger; he dispossesses them of a protection, which consist in ignorance, and removes from human violence its last fetters.”⁵⁹

The functionalisation and reduction of the circumstances of the sacrificial phenomenon have long been recognized in the quarter of a century since the publication of the Burkert-Girard position.⁶⁰ “Like Girard, Burkert postulates the sacred as a transcendent power and sacrifice as a violent act, which makes this transcendence possible. While Girard derives violence from an obscure metaphysic of human drives,⁶¹ Burkert bases them in genetic platitudes. The genetic make-up acquired by man during the hunter-gatherer period supposedly produced the evolution of a strong intra-communal disposition to violence, which was originally evacuated through the aggression exercised towards the hunting prey. Sacrifice would therefore

⁵⁷ See W. R. Smith, *Lectures of the Religion of the Semites. First Series: The Fundamental Institutions* (1889), London: A. & C. Black, 1894².

⁵⁸ See R. Girard, *La violence et le sacré*, Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1972 as well as R. Girard, *Der Sündenbock* (1982), Zürich: Benziger, 1988.

⁵⁹ R. Girard, *Das Heilige und die Gewalt* (1972), Zürich: Benziger, 1987, S. 201.

⁶⁰ Walter Burkert admitted forthrightly about his and Girard’s work: «Strategies of criticism against all too global theories of sacrifice will hit both books (*Homo Necans*, 1972 and *La violence et le sacré*, 1972) equally.» See W. Burkert, «Glaube und Verhalten: Zeichengehalt und Wirkungsmacht von Opferritualen», in: J. Rudhardt, O. Reverdin (pub.), *Le Sacrifice dans l’Antiquité*, Geneve: Vandoeuvres, Fondation Hardt Pour l’Etude de L’Antiquité Classique, Entretiens, Tome XXVII, 1981, p. 110. See also an approach to Girard by W. Burkert, obvious already in its choice of title: *Anthropologie des religiösen Opfers: Die Sakralisierung der Gewalt*, München: Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung, 1984.

⁶¹ An undeclared apokalyptic attitude in which a private desire for annihilation is interpreted as generally valid anthropology has been long detected in Girard’s work. See J. Greisch, «Homo Mimeticus: Kritische Überlegungen zu den anthropologischen Voraussetzungen von René Girards Opferbegriff», in: R. Schenk (Hg.), *Zur Theorie des Opfers: Ein interdisziplinäres Gespräch*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstadt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995, p. 27ff.

be a “ritualized equivalent of hunting.”⁶² Mere polemic is of course unable to explain the deeper attachment of Burkert to his pattern of explanation, so that it has been suggested that it served “to fight back anguish.”⁶³

In defense of Burkert, it must be said that the transformation of the labor of hunting into a genetically anchored, enduring aggressivity, constitutes the basis of his theory, yet tries itself understandably rarely to scientific, biological proof. The lizard’s giving up of his tail in order to save his own life is already for him the strongest argument in favor of a phylogenetically anchored disposition to sacrifice.⁶⁴ Burkert relies mostly on popular anthropology, such as has been spread by the ideology of evolution, which was able for a long time to dominate biology, until it began to recede in the seventies of the twentieth century in favor of scientific examination (see chapter IV., below). At a closer look, even Walter Burkert would probably admit that the instinct to hunt must have been surely present even before the aggression in question, which he sees flowing into the genetic make-up only through hunting. If man had been forced to evolve aggression over millennia in order to become a hunter, he himself would have become the prey of predators, and would never have arrived at hunting.

Moreover, it must be remarked that many cultures have found ways to evacuate aggressivity - wherever its origins - through non violent ways. Shadow-boxing and cane-fighting, boxing and ring matches, the shooting of bows and arrows and spear-throwing have proved civil sublimations of war and hunting, next to which an additional gratification of hunting-lust through the sacrificial evacuation of hate should not need to take much space. Also heavily violent evacuation of dangerous aggressivity in the form of the socially costly blood revenge may exist *alongside* blood sacrifice and therefore cannot explain it.

Still, what remains important about Burkert’s work is the fact that he was able to distinguish the blood ritual more closely than other authors⁶⁵ from the *do ut des* (I give, so that you may give): “In the center of sacrifice there is neither the gift to the

⁶² V Valeri, *Kingship and Sacrifice: Ritual and Sacrifice in Ancient Hawaii*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985, p. 70.

⁶³ See M. Treml, «Animalisches Erbe in den Religionen: Walter Burkerts Gifford Lectures in Buchform», in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung/Internationale Ausgabe*, 18. / 19. Januar 1997, p. 50.

⁶⁴ W. Burkert, *Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions*, Cambridge/Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1996.

⁶⁵ See typically J. van Baal, «Offering, Sacrifice and Gift», in: *Numen*, Vol. 23, December 1976, p. 161, who also apprehend blood sacrifice in terms of a gift. M. Panoff u. M. Perrin, *Taschenwörterbuch der Ethnologie*, pub. by J. Stagl, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1982, p. 23, define sacrifice in a similarly trivial and perplexed way as «the actions through which animals or humans are separated from their peers or killed in order to be given to the gods». In the same vein, M. M. Rind, in *Menschenopfer: Vom Kult der Grausamkeit*, Regensburg: Universitätsverlag Regensburg, 1996, p. 13, writes: «Under ‘sacrifice’ is designates the offering of a gift to a divine power and in its widest meaning, the gift itself.»

gods, nor the communion with them, but the killing of the living being.”⁶⁶ There still remains to be explained what this holy-healing action stands for, if it cannot be reduced to the undying lust for the joys of hunting.

It goes without saying that there is a good piece of truth in the representation of sacrificial ritual as an act of community-building. For all who have taken part in the holy killing have gained release from excitement and stand *communally* guilty for this. They become therefore companions, “*partners in crime.*” Therefore, they have perplexing feelings towards all those who did not participate in the collective killing ritual. Through their non-participation, the critics of sacrifice become living witnesses to the fact that one can do without sacrificial killings. In truth, such witnesses stand outside the community of the blood spillers, they disturb it and often they run the danger of being persecuted by it. We shall address this in chapters IX and X in analyzing the hatred of Jews. Robertson, Smith, Girard, Burkert and the others, all plainly see something indisputable, yet it remains mysterious to them, in fact, not even worthy of examination: what is this “something” that troubles the community so deeply, that it needs such monstrous means for its cure.

When nothing more than an unchangeable anthropological constant is put to the task to explain sacrifice, the question must needs be raised, why the great sacrificial cults of humans and animals have not been practiced in all times and all places. For after all, human aggression is born with and in every human child. The great cults, on the other hand, appear on the stage of history at the beginning of the Bronze Age, and come to a crisis at the beginning of the Iron Age. Radical movements emerge, pitted against the ceremonial scenography of holy butchering, of which the dominant representatives are Prophetic Judaism and Buddhism which, two and a half millennia later, have not lost their influence. A purely psychoanalytical or anthropological explanation finds therefore quickly its limit, when confronted to such a historically changing phenomenon. Yet, these theories must remain relevant for the elucidation of the typical emotional reactions to fundamentally not man-made cataclysms.

In isolation - and barely taken notice of - more deeply searching reflections about sacrifice have been carried on. Godfrey Lienhardt for instance is convinced that, in the rituals, general human emotions are not only “reflected,”⁶⁷ but are preceded by inhabital circumstances in the social and natural spheres, which exist quite independently from the emotional life. One would like of course to know more about such exceptional circumstances. From Assyriology, which must deal with the seals represented above, the origins of the rituals have been situated in “a power outside of

⁶⁶ W. Burkert, «Griechische Tragödie und Opferritual», in: Idem, *Wilder Ursprung: Opferritual und Mythos bei den Griechen*, Berlin: Wagenbach, 1990, S. 21; see also W. Burkert, «Glaube und Verhalten: Zeichengehalt und Wirkungsmacht von Opferritualen», in: J. Rudhardt, O. Reverdin (pub.), *Le Sacrifice dans l'Antiquité*, Geneve: Vandoeuvres, Fondation Hardt Pour l'Etude de L'Antiquite Classiques, Entretiens, Tome XXVII, 1981, p. 109.

⁶⁷ See G. Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961, p. 170.

this world.”⁶⁸ “Supra-natural forces [as well as] beings and powers beyond the habitual experience of man”⁶⁹ or even the descent of “chaos”⁷⁰ have been suggested to be behind the emergence of sacrificial rituals: “the execution of the sacrifice takes place in a cosmic frame,”⁷¹ and “sacrifice was the most efficient procedure to communicate with supra-natural forces.”⁷²

⁶⁸ See T. Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976, p. 3.

⁶⁹ See G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Function in Ancient and Other Cultures*, Berkeley and Chicago: University of California Press, 1970, p. 283.

⁷⁰ C. Geertz, «Religion as a Culture System», in: M. Banton (Hg.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London: Tavistock, 1966.

⁷¹ Vgl. W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*, Stuttgart et al.: Kohlhammer, 1977, S. 79.

⁷² See E. Wasilewska, «Organization and Meaning of Sacred Space in Prehistoric Anatolia», in: J. Quaegebeur (pub.), *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the International Conference Organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to 20th of April 1991*, Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters & Department Orientalistiek Leuven, 1993, S. 485.

IV

The sudden emergence of the great sacrificial cults and of priest-kingship at the beginning of the Bronze Age

“What legal or pious representations or situations of economical and social stress brought on this event [the acceptance of a royalty of sacrificial priests in Mesopotamia] we will probably never know.”⁷³

“The vexing question of the nature of slaying and fire sacrifices in the Egyptian cult is still awaiting an answer.”⁷⁴

“We have seen forthwith that the greatest festivities of antiquity harked back to the memory of the Flood and of the great revolutions on the surface of the Earth. We shall encounter this truth again in the manifestations of worry and sadness which we can make out right in the middle of the roaring joy of most of the festivities of the ancients.”⁷⁵

In the last of the opinions cited above concerning the great cults, the scholarly investigation of myths and sacrifice of the 18th century emits propositions much different from those of today’s authors. Among the scholars of these long gone blossoming times of free scientific enquiry there raises once again as a dominant figure the geologist, sociologist and engineer of bridges and fortifications Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger (1722-1759).⁷⁶ In modern writings his name is almost never mentioned. His compatriot, the sacrifice scholar René Girard does not know about the existence of a man who wrote for the *Encyclopédie* the articles *Déluge*, *Corvée* and *Société*. Darwinian belief into excruciatingly slow and practically uniform evolutionary processes in natural and human history has pushed aside the work of

⁷³ See A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, revised edition completed by E. Reiner, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977, p. 97.

⁷⁴ See H. Junker, «Die Schlacht- und Brandopfer im Tempelkult der Spätzeit», in: *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, vol. 47, 1910, p. 69.

⁷⁵ N.-A. Boulanger, *Das durch seine Gebräuche aufgedeckte Altertum: Oder Kritische Untersuchung der vornehmsten Meynungen, Ceremonien und Einrichtungen der verschiedenen Völker des Erdbodens in Religions- und bürgerlichen Sachen* (1766), Greifswald: Anton Ferdinand Rösens Buchhandlung, 1767, p. 135.

⁷⁶ About the geological work, see J. Hampton, *Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger et la science de son temps*, Geneve: Droz, 1955. About Boulanger’s significance in the theory of religion, see F. E. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959, p. 223 f.

Boulanger. In his own time, this ideology was still in its infancy.⁷⁷ The dogmatization of Darwinism in the 19th and 20th century, which rolled back serious research for over a century and a half, was not yet an impediment to thinking.

Boulanger had no inkling of the texts which would be unearthed much later in Mesopotamia, in which the origin of the earliest priest-kingship, complete with temples and rituals, is ascribed to a catastrophic flood. In the so-called Sumerian list of kings, the first fragment of which was published in 1906, it is said (v. 39-42):

“The flood rolled over it.

After the flood had rolled over it

when the [priest-] kingship had been let down from heaven

there was the [priest-] kingship in Kish.”⁷⁸

As the term “kingship” is being used, the text must be ascribed to a time in which kings used the flood narratives for the sake of their legitimation. We must therefore assume that there existed originally only a priestly function, to which accrued with time worldly power.⁷⁹

From a cuneiform tablet of a later origin, King Assurbanipal, conventionally⁸⁰ assigned to the 7th century B.P., boasts that he “finds pleasure in reading the stones of

⁷⁷ See about precursors of evolutionism B. Glass, O. Temkin, W. L. Straus Jr. (ed.), *Forerunners of Darwin: 1745-1859*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959.

⁷⁸ See T. Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939, p. 77.

The Flood had swept thereover.

After the Flood had swept thereover,

when the [priest-]kingship was lowered from heaven

the [priest-]kingship was in Kish.»

⁷⁹ See J. R. Davila, «The Flood Hero as King and Priest», in: *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 54, Nr. 3, 1995, p. 199ff.

⁸⁰ My using of the term “conventional” in matters of dating expresses decided misgivings towards the pious and/or pseudo-astronomical datings of the dominant doctrine. This is not the place to dissipate the confusion about the greatly varying datings indicated for the birth of the high cultures. It is also easily understood that in order to explain the nature of a thing, its dating remains more or less irrelevant. The fluctuations between the late 4th Millennium B.C. (from Spain to the Indus Valley) all the way to the end of the late 2nd Millennium A.D. (East Asia, China, Mesoamerica) are due to the diversity and moreover, to the obscurity of the dating processes, not to varying real ages or to the stratigraphic depths of the digging layers. See G. Heinsohn, «Astronomical Dating and Calendrics», presentation made at the 22nd Annual Meeting der *International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (ISCSC)*, University of Scranton/Pennsylvania, 3.-6. Juni 1993; see Idem, *The Restoration of Ancient History. Did the Historians of Classical Greece Merely Leave Us Lies and Fantasies About All the Major Empires, Nations and Events of Antiquity? Or: How to Reconcile Archaeologically-missing Historical Periods with Historically-unexpected Archaeological Strata of the Ancient World*, Bremen: Universität, 1995, as well as Idem, *Assyrikerkönige gleich Perserherrscher! Die Assyrienfunde bestätigen das Achämenidenreich*, Gräfelfing: Mantis, 1996. See also fn 128 of the present text.

the time from before the flood.”⁸¹ Indeed, his library, unearthed in Nineveh, revealed archaic written tablets which date back to the beginning of the Bronze Age (conventionally dated between 3100 and 2750 B.P.),⁸² which therefore stem from a period upon which more flood catastrophes would follow (see also the diagram at the end of chapter IV. below).

Already in Boulanger’s time, it was known that the numerous traditions of classical antiquity - recorded by Augustine - assigned the origins of priest-kingship to a flood cataclysm: “In those times [after the flood of Deucalion] the kings of Greece initiated the worship for the pagan gods, which were to rekindle in annually renewed festivities the memory of the Flood and the salvation of the people, as well as the difficulties of the life of those who were at first resettled into the mountains, then into the plains.”⁸³ In the 4th century B.C., Aristotle’s master-pupil Theophrast contributes reflections on the origins of blood sacrifice in Greece which by no means date it back to the beginnings of humanity. Only “in times when unusual hardships came upon our race, were living beings [dedicated] to sacrifice.”⁸⁴

As long as the relationship between catastrophes - which were remembered everywhere in antiquity - and sacrificial cults remains obscured, the enigma of sacrifice will not be solvable. The duel-sacrifices also inspire Boulanger to much more concrete thinking than the drive to live or to die, or Thanatos: “Notwithstanding all the noise and solemnity of these games and festivities, one has nevertheless taken notice of the fact that they resembled tragedies more than pleasure games. And what might have been the motive for the beating and fighting of fencers in all of these games? Their first purpose had no doubt been to represent in a sensuous way the combats of the gods. One sacrificed to storms, lightning flashes and thunderclaps and imitated these atmospheric phenomena with much noise and rumble. Of the warlike dances in the honor of *Castor* it was believed that they represented the war of the [celestial] giants. Athenaeus writes about a dance which was called the *burning of the world*.”⁸⁵

⁸¹ See D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (1927), vol. II, London: Histories & Mysteries of Man Ltd., 1989, p. 379.

⁸² D. O. Edzard, «Keilschrift», in: *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, Bd. 5, Berlin und New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976-80, p. 560.

⁸³ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 18: 12.

⁸⁴ Theophrastos, *On Piety* 12: 122/123.

⁸⁵ N.-A. Boulanger, *Das durch seine Gebräuche aufgedeckte Altertum: Oder Kritische Untersuchung der vornehmsten Meynungen, Ceremonien und Einrichtungen der verschiedenen Völker des Erdbodens in Religions- und bürgerlichen Sachen* (1766), Greifswald: Anton Ferdinand Rösens Buchhandlung, 1767, p. 125f.



Ill. 6: Terra cotta Plaquette from Old Babylonian Chafadschi. A man disguised as a celestial god, wearing a crown of horns, slays another human who, wearing a star-mask and a scale-shirt, plays the heavenly serpent (see also Ill. 26).⁸⁶

⁸⁶ See M. V. Seton-Williams, *Babylonien: Kunstschatze zwischen Euphrat und Tigris*, Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1981, p.132



Ill. 7: Representation of the god Assur outside of a sacrificial scene in which he is represented by a man (adapted from a glazed tile of the city of Assur).⁸⁷

Is it possible, therefore, that in the rituals the *flood* and the *burning of the world* are indeed imitated? And what reality do these menacing words represent? Are the

⁸⁷ See M. V Seton-Williams, *Babylonien: Kunstschatze zwischen Euphrat und Tigris*, Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1981, p. 132.

participants not acting as representing themselves? Could they be, far beyond that, actors who were made to take on a dangerous, even a murderous part? There seems to be no doubt about this in Meuli: “Of course it is strange, but unobjectionably proven, that one played at ‘the flood.’”⁸⁸ So were celebrated every spring on Aegina - as in other communities of Greece - the “Hydrophoria” (water festivals). During these games, racers had to carry water jugs on their shoulders, that is, carry on an “agon amphorites.”⁸⁹

In Argos “there stands a sanctuary to Poseidon Prosklystios [the Inundater]; for it is said that Poseidon had inundated a great part of the lands, when Inachos and his comrades-in-arms had decided that the land should belong to Hera and not to Poseidon. Hera obtained then from Poseidon that the sea withdrew. And the Argives erected to Poseidon Prosklystios a sanctuary on the very spot, where the flood started to draw back.”⁹⁰

In Hierapolis in Syria “they do the following in remembrance of this [flood] legend: twice a year, water from the sea is brought to the temple. Not only the priests carry water, but [people from] all of Syria and Arabia. And from the lands to the other side of the Euphrates many people come to the sea, and all of them carry water. At first they spill it in the temple, then it goes down the fissure, and the fissure takes on a lot of water, despite the fact that it is but small. They do this and say that Deucalion has introduced this rite in the temple, so that the disaster and the good deed should be remembered.”⁹¹

The modern disregard for the reality content of such stories has meanwhile begun to shake. In excavations of the temple of Hera in the Syrian city of Hierapolis, about the cult of which we are informed by Lucian, a cleft in the earth has indeed been uncovered, “which might have received the water which was spilled in memory of the Flood.”⁹²

Until the twentieth century, a flood festival is held on Cyprus which bears since

⁸⁸ J. Black, A. Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary*, London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1992, p.38

⁸⁹ K. Meuli, «Die gefesselten Götter» (1964), in: Idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by T. Geizer, vol. II, Basel: Schwabe & Co., 1975, S. 1042. See in detail B. J. Peiser, *Das Dunkle Zeitalter Olympias: Kritische Untersuchungen der historischen, archäologischen und naturgeschichtlichen Probleme der griechischen Achsenzeit am Beispiel der antiken Olympischen Spiele*, Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 1993, p. 253-266; see also B. J. Peiser, «Catastrophism and Anthropology. The Influence of Scientific Neo-Catastrophism on the Interpretation of Flood Legends and Rituals», in: B. Newgrosh (ed.), *Evidence that the Earth Has Suffered Catastrophes in Historical Times*, Manchester: SIS, 1994, p. 130-134. See. B. J. Peiser, «Catastrophe Games: Playful Re-enactment of Traumatic Events», in: G. Pfister, T Niewerth, G. Steins (ed.), *Games of the World Between Tradition and Modernity*, Sankt Augustin: Akademia, 1996, p. 108ff.

⁹⁰ *Schol. Pindar Nem. Od. V*, 81.

⁹¹ Pausanias II, 22, 4.

⁹² Lucian, *De Dea Syria*, 13.

Antiquity the name of “Kataklysmos.” Relegated to the date of Pentecost in the Christian calendar, people take a ritual bath in the sea, and on land they throw water at each other.⁹³ In Continental Asia there existed sacrificial ceremonies, in which animals were drowned.⁹⁴

Let’s now look at an archaeological find from the cradle of civilization, Mesopotamia. In a small temple to the New Year in the city of Assur from the 1st millennium B.P. there was found a cuneiform text: “The figure of Assur, which draws into battle against Tiamat, is the figure of King Sennacherib.”⁹⁵ In the ritual, therefore, the King plays the role of the celestial body Assur, which must defeat the flood-bringing celestial body Tiamat. In perfect correspondence, we know about ancient Egypt that the king fulfilled his most important function - that is to say, his priestly function - in that he annihilated “humans, animals or objects as aspects of threat” - often it was the monstrous attacker and cosmic troublemaker Seth or Apophis⁹⁶ - with the blow of a cudgel, or a stroke of a spear, or the throwing of a an arrow or through fire.⁹⁷ The Pharaoh “does not appear as the loyal benevolent caretaker-provider of the temple, or as the good ‘h’-serpent or the Nile, which floods everything with food, but as the grim hero who stabs, crushes and dismembers the fiend, yes, his titles are often derived directly from the combat scenes of the myth.”⁹⁸ Could it be therefore that those are right who want to see fighting and murdering gods in the cylinder-seals? Yes, indeed, but the others are not wrong either: it is real humans and animals who are killed and they are killed impersonating gods. It is this aspect of impersonation in the holy-blood plays which is so difficult to grasp. Why the star-masks and the crowns of horns? When - moving from Mesopotamia to Cyprus - a bull stands in for the celestial body-god Zeus, who then is represented by the sacrificers of humans (*Kerastei*, i.e. horned ones), who sport one part of this bull as an insignium? Scholarship has no answer for this question: “It is particularly puzzling that masks were fashioned out of

⁹³ See G. A. Caduff, *Antike Sintflut sagen*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986, p. 126.

⁹⁴ See J. Henninger, «Sacrifice», in: M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York u. London: Macmillan/Collier Macmillan, 1987, vol. 12,pS. 546.

⁹⁵ See A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, revised edition completed by E. Reiner, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977, p. 185.

⁹⁶ See p. e. F. Labrique, *Stylistique et théologie à Edfou: Le rituel de l'offrande de la campagne. Etude de la composition*, Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Department Orientalistiek, 1992, p. 121 f. («abattre Apophis»).

⁹⁷ S. Schoske, «Vernichtungsrituale», in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Band VI, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986, Sp. 1009.

⁹⁸ See H. Junker, «Die Schlacht- und Brandopfer im Tempelkult der Spätzeit», in: *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, vol. 47,1910, p. 73.

bulls' skulls, which the priests wore for the sacrifice."⁹⁹

Who is opposing whom in the sacrificial combat? Did one celestial body descend upon another, which occasioned the impersonation in ritual later on by one bull and one man wearing a bull's mask? That's exactly how it looks. But what are fighting celestial bodies supposed to mean? Many thousand kilometers to the West - in pre-Columbian Mexico - very similar rituals were performed. Once more, victims and priests did not play their own role, but those of deified celestial bodies: "For the killing of the prisoners, priestly office-bearers appear who, in the aspects of gods, especially those of the gods of Xipe-Totec, perform the cruel act. So for instance there appears at the ceremony a priest in the form of the god *Opochtli*, and the killing itself is performed by the 'drinker of night' (a by-name of the god Xipe) in the form of Totec."¹⁰⁰ As a participant, we also find the body-painted, ornated and then sacrificed prisoner Xipe-Totec i.e. "our Lord, the tortured one,"¹⁰¹ whose flailed skin is then donned by the priest playing Xipe as a costume.



⁹⁹ See W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*, Stuttgart et al.: Kohlhammer, 1977, p. 95.

¹⁰⁰ A. E. Jensen, *Mythos und Kult bei den Naturvölkern: Religionswissenschaftliche Betrachtungen* (1951), with an introduction by E. Haberland, München: dtv, 1991, p. 244.

¹⁰¹ See E. Seier, «Xippe ycuic, totec (yaollavana): Der Gesang unseres Herrn des Geschundenen, (des Nachtrinkers)», in: Idem. *Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur amerikanischen Sprach- und Altertumskunde*, Berlin: Asher & Co., vol. II., 1904, p. 1071 ff.

Ill 8.: A youth prepared for sacrifice through heart-extraction wearing the celestial body-costume of Tezcatlipoca from the 2. Book of the Florentine Codex (16. Cent.).¹⁰²



Ill. 9: Performance of a heart-extraction in the classical style of Veracruz. Ball-playing field of Le Tajin, 4th panel.¹⁰³

¹⁰² From K. Taube (ed.), *Aztec and Maya Myths*, London: Trustees of the British Museum by British Museum Press, 1993.

¹⁰³ See. H. B. Nicholson, «Mesoamerican Iconography», in: M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York u. London: Macmillan/Collier Macmillan, 1987, vol. 7, p. 25.

Even better documented than the Xipe-impersonators are the youths who play the Toltec-Aztec celestial body Tezcatlipoca¹⁰⁴ (see ill. 8), until in the month of Toxatl their heart is cut out: “For this feast, they chose a young man of a very docile temperament whom they had entertained during a full year with pleasant activities... They were very careful that he should be the most able and best educated man who could be found, and that his body was without flaw... they left his wives and the rest of the crowd behind them... only eight pages remained with him, who had accompanied him throughout the year. Then they took him to a small and sparsely furnished temple, which... was far away from any settlement... After they had reached the steps of the temple, he climbed them by himself, and on the first step, he broke one of the flutes on which he had played during the time of his good life. On the second step, he broke another one, on the third step yet another one, and so he broke all his flutes while he climbed up the steps. When he had reached the top, priests were standing there, two by two, who would kill him. They took him, tied his hands, held his head and bent him backwards over the block. The priest with the stone knife thrust it with great vehemence into his chest. Then he removed it, put his hand into the opening which had been made by the knife, tore out the heart and lifted it at once towards the sun.”¹⁰⁵

Could we be told here in the New World of an impersonator of a Mercurian, Pan-type god, rising in the firmament, whose loss of flutes ends with an Icarus-like fall into the sun? “Pyre” or “firehole”¹⁰⁶ are cuneiform names for Mercury.

Assur against Tiamat, Xipe-Totec against his equivalent, “Enki against Kur,”¹⁰⁷ “Ninurta against Asag,”¹⁰⁸ “Marduk against Tiamat,”¹⁰⁹ but also “Gilgamesh against

¹⁰⁴ See R. Lehmann-Nitsche, «Tezcatlipoca und Quetzalcoatl. Ihre ursprüngliche Sternnatur», in: *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, vol. 70, 1938, p. 10 ff.

¹⁰⁵ B. de Sahagun, *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva Espana* (1590), ed. by M. A. Saignes, Mexico City: Editorial Nueva Espana, 1946, drei Bände, Bd. 1, p. 148 ff.

¹⁰⁶ See P. Jensen, *Die Kosmologie der Babylonier: Studien und Materialien. Mit einem mythologischen Anhang und 3 Karten*, Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1890, p. 123.

¹⁰⁷ See S. N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer: Thirty-Nine Firsts in Man's Recorded History*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981, p. 169 f.

¹⁰⁸ S. N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer: Thirty-Nine Firsts in Man's Record-ed History*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981, p. 170f

¹⁰⁹ See a. o. J. B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Pnnceton: Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 64ff.

Huwawa”¹¹⁰ represent probably only different traditions reporting the same cataclysmic event. A cosmic force of destruction strikes one cosmic savior - often even one who was virginally born out of it ¹¹¹ (Compare also ill. 6) -

The representation of birth from a celestial virgin is not - it goes without saying - a display of anatomic ignorance, but the anthropomorphization of inorganic events. It appears as if humans had mythologized as a birth from a virgin a cosmic event in which a smaller celestial body had been detached from a larger one without the help of a third intervener. Should it be the case that the Christic myth too be a remembrance of such an event, it is to the honor of the Catholic clergy that it ducks painfully under the mockery of the biologically outlandish “immaculate birth,” yet without yielding about it. The priests possibly guess that in the figure of Christ as a celestial infant they are preserving and defending the most persistent godhead of antiquity who, need it be said, could not have been born of a woman. An exemplary representative for an amusing, but unfulfilled irritation of the clerical belief in the virgin birth is given by German intellectual Uta Ranke-Heinemann, who converted from Protestantism to Catholicism.¹¹²

Just as among Christians Maria, the Mother of God, the Madonna, the Black Madonna, the Madonna of here and there, the Holy Virgin, the *Regina Coelis* etc. always point to the same deity, in the same way there have been innumerable equivalents for Venus, which in more or less great variations hark back to an original type. Often variants of stories about one and the same celestial power recur as stories about varied celestial powers. To a roster of pre-Christian Madonnas should be counted, for instance: Aedon, Agdistis, Anat, Aphrodite, Artemis, Astarte, Aschera, Atargatis, Athena, Baalat, Belti, Kybele, Dea Syria, Erion, Esther, Freia, Gorgo, Hannahannas, Hekate, Hera, Inanna, Inaras, Iris, Ishtar, Isis, Judith, Kore, Kubaba, Leto, Maia, Maria, Medusa, Meter, Nike, Orthia, Persephone, Phaedra, Potiphar, Snake, Tanit, Tarpeia, Tiamat, Upis, etc.

Then, often becoming a savior through his own death, the spouse, foe, brother, lover, son of this godhead, torn from her, stripped to pieces, etc, appears under many names, which must point to his origin: Absalom, Adonis, Apollo, Attis, Baal, Dionysos, Dumuzi, Hadad, Herakles, Hermes, Hypolitus, Itys, Jesus Christus, Jüngling, Kind, Melkart, Merkur, Nabu, Pan, Orpheus, Osiris, Plutos, Tammuz, Thot, Yahwe, Zeus, etc. It also happens that the manly position taken up in one myth (for instance, the Mesopotamian Humbaba) takes on in another a female position (Gorgo,

¹¹⁰ See a. o. J. B. Pritchard (Hg.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Pnnceton: Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 78ff.

¹¹¹ For subject matter compare w. E. Norden, *Die Geburt des Kindes: Geschichte einer religiösen Idee*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1924.

¹¹² See U. Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchen für das Himmelreich*, Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1988.

Medusa, the Sphinx). In the same way, perceptions change, about who was the heavenly savior and who the heavenly trouble-maker.¹¹³

The deadly injured victor and therefore cosmic redeemer of the world prevents the occurring of floods and keeps the celestial bodies in order. This is particularly apparent in the Akkadian creation myth *Enuma Elish* rendered in the combat between Marduk and Tiamat (frame IV, 97-93, 137-140, and V., 1-7):

“Tiamat opened her mouth, in order to swallow him [Bel],
 she let in the evil wind, so that she could not close her lips.
 The raging winds crushed her body down,
 Her insides blew up, and she opened her mouth wide.
 He shot an arrow and pierced her body,
 he tore open her innards and extinguished her life,
 he threw down her corpse and stood on it...
 He parted her like a salt-fish in two parts:
 one half of her he put up and spread as the roof of heaven.
 He spread out her skin and *commissioned guardians*,
not to let out the water, he ordered them...
 He created the celestial seat for the great gods
 and created the constellations.
He set up the year, designed the borders,
 and put for the twelve months three stars for each;
 After he had ordered the year,
 he fixed the heavenly seat of Neberu
 [Jupiter], in order to establish the distances between stars.
So that none should sin or be found neglectful,
 he configured the heavenly positions of Enlil and Ea
 together with him...”¹¹⁴

The next to the last verse is translated as: “*So that none of them [the celestial bodies] should go astray or leave its orbit*”¹¹⁵ in a word for word, rather than an allegorical translation, by an English scholar. Irregularly moving celestial bodies, perceived as gods who, with their catastrophic actions, threaten or spare humans on Earth, are in the center of the great cults. As we do not yet know why this is so, we

¹¹³ Compare with cosmic god names, their combative roles and their frequent exchanges of identity in elaborate detail in J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (1959), Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1980.

¹¹⁴ See K. Hecker, W. G. Lambert, G. G. W. Müller, W. v. Soden, A. Ünal, *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments. Band III. Lieferung 4: Weisheitstexte, Mythen und Epen II*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994, p. 586/587/ 587f., my emphasis.

¹¹⁵ See S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (1989), Oxford u. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 255: «so that none of them could go wrong or stray».

ask: Why do human, but also animal actors play inorganic forces? What events were so overwhelming as to make collectivities of adult humans play back their impressions like small children in order to regain their psychic balance? Why are god-actors killed in ritual duels? What is a god? How does he get himself an animal, human or mixed form? Why are kings also priests? Why do firmly appointed priests suddenly come into existence? What makes human beings from the tribal societies of the Stone Ages suddenly ready, at the beginning of the Bronze Ages, to recognize some of their fellow men, who are now priest-princes, as lords dominating them, and to furnish them with gifts? How, that is, did we reach this first - priestly-feudalistic - step of human high culture?

To the departments of history and of religious history, all these questions appear without easy answers.¹¹⁶ The social-science reflections over the emergence of the first high cultures after tribal society are at an impasse as well: “despite the fact that scholars have reflected about the beginnings of civilization, ever since there is an interest in history, this field of research remains empirically as well as theoretically in its infancy.”¹¹⁷

It remains as an indisputable fact that, in the Mesopotamian cradle of civilization, priests and temples “act as catalyzer for the foundation of cities.”¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, in the literature, the causes brought forward for the sudden emergence of places of cult are still estimated as being “various and highly accidental.”¹¹⁹ At least, the cosmic-astral origin of religion is beginning to be vaguely recognized: “We do not understand from what the Sumerians and the Semites may have derived their representations of the ‘divine.’ But the cuneiform texts give us an interesting hint: the symbol sign which stands for a deity - the symbol of a star - is the same as the one that stand for ‘in the heights’, for the ‘elevated,’ more precisely, for the upper sector of the ‘universe,’ the ‘sky.’ In this respect, the divine world was represented in a very fundamental way in opposition to all things here below as ‘superior,’ in some ways, as ‘heavenly.’”¹²⁰

For the Minoan-Mycenean culture-space, i.e., the Greek Bronze Ages, the perplexity is hardly less than for the land between the two rivers: “A general

¹¹⁶ See A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, revised edition completed by E. Reiner, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977, p. 97.

¹¹⁷ C. L. Redman, *The Rise of Civilization: From Early Farmers to Urban Societies in the Ancient Near East*, San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1978, p. 278.

¹¹⁸ See C. K. Maiseis, *The Emergence of Civilization*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990, p. 155.

¹¹⁹ See C. K. Maiseis, *The Emergence of Civilization*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990, p. 302.

¹²⁰ Bottero, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning and the Gods* (1987, 1992), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 211.

archaeological model for cultural evolution is still missing today. It remains difficult to identify the ‘first movers’ of the change [to priest-kingship].”¹²¹

Despite all the perplexity, it is understood that it is precisely the culture of blood sacrifices, with its priests and temples, which brings about the change of one culture (the Neolithic) into a high culture (the Bronze Age). Hindu historians also classify as “period of sacrifice,”¹²² what is seen relatively vaguely in western historical writing as the Bronze Age. Even this very term harks back to evolutionary thinking, that seeks to find in the progress and refinement of metallurgy an insurance against natural historical upheavals.

One look over India to China teaches us that processes of metal melting could hardly be sufficient to make understandable the steps of humanity. There too, the beginning of high culture distinguishes itself, next to the innovations of “bronze metallurgy, writing and the horse-drawn chariot” through the emergence of *human sacrifice*”¹²³

In the New World, things are hardly different: “practically nothing is known about the earliest palaeo-Indian inhabitants of Mesoamerica.”¹²⁴ The ritual ball game with its follow up of the killing of players begins only after the time of hunter-gatherers, with Olmec high culture: “Around 1200 B.C. something unusual happened, ‘the sudden emergence of the Olmec culture in full bloom (Coe).’”¹²⁵ It is precisely places dedicated to this purpose, and the sacral architecture, which define this high culture. The colossal stone heads of the early Olmec culture have therefore been interpreted as “monumental symbols of decapitated ball-players.”¹²⁶

Still in the Age of Copper (chalcolithic) which, according to stratigraphic

¹²¹ O. Dickinson, *The Aegean Bronze Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, S. 296.

¹²² G. B. Walker, *The Hindu World: An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism*, New York: Praeger, 1968.

¹²³ See K. Chang, *The Archaeology of China*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963, p. 136, my emphasis; compare also T. T. Chang, *Der Kult der Shang-Dynastie im Spiegel der Orakelschriften: Eine paläographische I Studie zur Religion im archaischen China*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1970, p. 73.

¹²⁴ M. Miller, K. Taube, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya: An Illustrated Dictionary of Mesoamerican Religion*, London und New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993, p. 26; see also K. V. Flannery, J. Marcus (Hg.), *The Cloud People: Divergent Evolution of the Zapotec and Mixtec Civilizations*, New York und London: Academy Press, 1983, p. 30.

¹²⁵ B. J. Meggers, «The Transpacific Origin of Mesoamerican Civilization: A Preliminary Review of the Evidence and its Theoretical Implications», in: *American Anthropologist*, vol. 77, 1975, p. 1.

¹²⁶ See B. J. Peiser, *Der Ursprung des mesoamerikanischen Ballspiels*, Liverpool: John Moores University/School of Human Sciences, 1995, Computer printing, p. 10. Compare also Idem, «Cosmic Catastrophism and the Ballgame of the Sky Gods in Mesoamerican Mythology», in: *Chronology and Catastrophism Review*, Band XVII, Special Issue, 1995, p. 29ff.

findings, simultaneously and directly precedes the high cultures of the Bronze Age,¹²⁷ “cults and holy places were limited to the domestic area. Public temples with a staff of full-time priests still belonged to the future.”¹²⁸ More to the West, too, at the time of palatial feudalism, special facilities “for ritual activities and especially for repeated activities, such as one would associate with a common practice, are remarkably difficult to find.”¹²⁹ But already in the oldest religious traditions of Bronze Age Egypt, in the so-called Pyramid Texts, the receivers of the cults and the recitors of texts take on “the role of gods.”¹³⁰ The root-cause of a break, observed all over the world, with the time in which religion was still mainly confined to funeral and hunting rituals, must be illuminated, if ritual killing is to give up its mystery.

¹²⁷ Once more we must point out here the chronological confusion born out of unidentified Bible piety and unfounded astronomical retro-calculations of today’s sciences of antiquity. The beginning of high culture, with casts of priests, temples, blood sacrifices and astral religions in varied territories ist stretched over a time span going from the 4th to the 1st millennium B. C. despite the fact that archaeological finds (especially the number of stratigraphic layers per dig) as well as cultural-historical circumstances do not warrant such distortions. See remark 81 above. See also G. Heinsohn u. H. Illig, *Wann lebten die Pharaonen? Archäologische und technologische Grundlagen für eine Neuschreibung der Geschichte Ägyptens und der übrigen Welt*, Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 1990, as well as H. Illig, *Chronologie und Katastrophismus. Vom ersten Menschen bis zum drohenden Asteroideneinschlag*, Gräfelfing: Mantis, 1992.

¹²⁸ G. Clark, *World Prehistory in New Perspective*, Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 63, 72; about the absence of priesthood in the late stone age, see also E. Vermeule, *Greece in the Bronze Age*, Chicago und London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 21.

¹²⁹ See O. Dickinson, *The Aegean Bronze Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 260.

¹³⁰ See H. Altenmüller, «Pyramidentexte», in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. V, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984, Sp. 16; compare in detail w. S. Schott, *Mythe und Mythenbildung im alten Ägypten*, Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1945, p. 6ff. and 30ff.