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## Aspects of Archaic Sacrifice: Sacrifice in the Structure of the Universe

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*In this work we study the ways of the culturological thought in the research into sacrifice. Some features of the archaic sacrifice are researched as a phenomenon, especially the correlation between sacrificial offering and immolation, along with its position in the universe structure. We have found some ways for further research: transition from the primary study of the ritual action to consideration of sacrifice as a religious phenomenon.*

*Keywords: sacrifice, archaic sacrifice, ritual, cosmogony, immolation, structure.*

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Sacrifice becomes the subject of thought as early as in ancient times, and then even though in a specific form, in the Middle Age scholasticism, the Renaissance and New Time occultism, but still only in the second part of the XIX century does a serious scientific and philosophical study begin. The research into sacrifice had a lot of peculiarities, two of which have an immediate relation to this subject matter. We should note that researchers, despite the non-religious character of their work, were still under the influence of the Christian legacy of the European civilization, the tradition which first of all saw sacrifice in the light of Christ's sacrifice. This peculiarity matched another one: sacrifice was treated as some wholesome phenomenon, whose unity could be understood by bringing it to one common origin or function. However, under the influence of the diversity of forms referring to the studied phenomenon which researchers came across

by the middle of the XX century, they started to gradually realize the heterogeneity of what was called sacrifice. There are some objections against the possibility of studying sacrifice through the prism of Abraham's religions (Das, 1983). Moreover, the existence of sacrifice as a wholesome phenomenon is called into question and some people suppose that as far as ancient peoples and modern conservation societies are concerned, it is necessary to at least speak about a specific type – «traditional sacrifice» (McClaymond, 2008, p. 27, 153). But still, partly because the range of phenomena, united by that term, is far too vast and comprises sacrifice of the primeval societies as well as sacrifice in Judaism and Islam, and partly because the term «traditional» itself offers different meanings, if applied to religions and societies, it makes more sense to talk not about «traditional» but «archaic» sacrifice (although this term is not satisfactory

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enough either). Archaic sacrifice possesses some specific features, one of the most essential is that sacrifice is embedded in the structure of the perception of the universe. However, we should first address some particular issue, which is directly connected with it, and that is the correlation between sacrifice and immolation.

**Sacrifice and immolation.** Many researches including W. Robertson-Smith, G. G. Fraser, Z. Freud, K.G. Jung, and after them G. Batay, J.-M. Haimone, R. Girard and others, despite the differences of how they perceive sacrifice, all in all understand it primarily as bloody sacrifice of an animal or a human. Moreover, W. Robertson-Smith, G.G. Fraser, Z. Freud and others saw immolation as one of the crucial parts of sacrifice, although the mere understanding of this event and the victim was different. R. Girard's view on sacrifice can be characterized the same way, not as the communion or a neurotic identification, but as legitimate violence. K. G. Jung considered sacrifice to be the main factor in the alchemic idea, that it was a tool of killing and at the same time reviving. G. Batay and J.-M. Hamone reach the same view on sacrifice, perceiving it as death experience and at the same time as a trick that lets one see the metaphysical realm, avoiding one's own demise. Even M. Moss, having profoundly studied bloodless sacrifice, regards it as a «murder» of plant. And the «murder» is the climax of the ritual, whether it is an animal's sacrifice or soma juice, after which the ritual decreases (Moss and Hubert, 200, p. 42). In other words, whatever sacrifice meant for the aforementioned researchers, immolation was the event, without which the function defining its existence, could not take place.

Nevertheless, not all researchers agree with such guideline. The described perception might be initially facilitated by the fact that in Christian tradition, whether it was Isaac's or Christ's sacrifice, death and sacrifice was basically the

same thing. However if we refer to ethnographical materials we find essential variations of immolation and sacrifice. According to V. Das, who studied the same case as M. Moss, sacrificing animals merely accompanies the extraction of soma juice, not identifies with it. And if Moss regarded soma extraction as its sacrifice, V. Das refers to Vedas where it is repeatedly said not to kill the soma which is being prepared. This means that whereas for M. Moss the sacrifice of soma is its murder and reincarnation, V. Das insists that sacrificing soma is victimless sacrifice.

K. McClaymond acknowledges the possibility of understanding an animal's sacrifice as a climax for some cultures. But he thinks that murder is just a way to continue the ritual and that it plays a minor part alleviating more important actions – manipulations with a sacrificial offering (McClaymond, 2008, p. 62). Any layman can kill an animal but it takes an expert to properly dismember a victim for the ritual, which lets one think that the murder itself is not the main ritual event (McClaymond, 2008).

One of the possible clues to understand the issue is space-time localization of immolation and sacrifice. Many researchers thought that immolation had to be at least timed to sacrifice. In the topological aspect it often corresponds to M. Moss's opinion, according to which immolation has to take place only in a holy place because otherwise it would be nothing but murder (Moss and Hubert, 2000, p. 33). Nevertheless, the place of immolation (or extraction if we talk about libation) did not always agree with the place and time of sacrifice itself. Polynesian tribe moray had sacrificial rites when during one feast they sacrificed an animal where the ritual was taking place and at the same time they brought animals that had been killed before. As far as human sacrifice is concerned, there were some specific requirements, the victim was chosen randomly, killed suddenly and far from the place where

the ritual was taking place (Campbell, 2002, p. 555-558). Besides sacrificing deer stabbed right during the feast, Koryaks also sacrificed deer fat, dried loach and jukola which had been prepared in advance and the marrow the day after sacrificing deer (Gorbacheva, 2004, p. 78). Sacrificial animals were stabbed during Chuvash feasts, although within the territory of the feast but far from the altar (Gorbacheva, 2004, p. 77-78). All this lets us think that sacrifice that took place in a different place and time was the peak or quintessence of the sacrificial ritual.

#### **Sacrifice in the structure of the universe.**

Within religious notions M. Moss defines sacrifice as a way of connection between a man and a sacred world (Moss and Hubert, 2000, p. 101). Moss regards the structure of the ritual space which, according to him, depends on the changes in the sacred status of the elements involved. The space of sacrifice is a field of concentric circles as Moss sees it, where the degree of sacrality grows as it gets closer to the centre – the place where sacrifice took place and where the sacrality has its peak (Moss and Hubert, 2000, p. 37, 38).

On a large scale the structure connected to sacrifice as M. Eliade views it, is close to the one described by M. Moss. However, Eliade studies it not only in the light of the changes taking place in the sacred status but through its connection to the universal system. M. Eliade insists that the altar construction is a microscopic imitation of the world creation and any sacrifice in its turn is a repetition of the Creation (Eliade, 2000, p. 30). Any universe according to Eliade is a structure based on the opposition between the centre and the periphery, and that any cosmogony respectively starts with finding the centre (Eliade, 1987, p. 145). Thus, sacrifice is always connected to the centre of the universe. Besides, M. Eliade does not take into consideration the existence of the sacred elements in the religious space, the ones

that are situated in the periphery of the concentric type cosmic structure.

E. Leech does not consider the spatial structure of sacrifice to be directly connected to a strictly concentric organization. According to E. Leech in a topographical sense, the world of people and the sacred world have something in common as far as sacrifice is concerned; thus, the altar does not only unite but also separate the mundane and the sacred (Leech, 2001, p. 101). E. Leech differentiates the spatial structural components using the same principles as M. Moss, based on the degree of sacred sense: the panel is This World and has the minimal sacred charge, whereas the northern part of the tabernacle is The Most Sacred Place is charged to the limit. The intermediate area – the concentration of active ritual events is also divided into a court, relatively deprived of religious taboo, and the southern part of the tabernacle which is relatively sacred. Between the latter ones there is a boundary and a link at the same time – the sacrificial altar, which is the threshold marking the passage from the usual «normal world» to the sacred «abnormal» one (Leech, 2001, p. 107). Apart from those areas that lie within the panel, Leech points to the existence of a «blank spot» in a desert, destined for things that are too «infected with sacredness» (ashes from the altar fire etc.) or on the contrary too «unclean».

Although E. Leech saw the structure of sacrifice first of all as a horizontal model, but in such a way that the horizontal can become the projection of the vertical (if we do not take into consideration the aforementioned «blank spot»). It is essential to note that the structure that Leech found is quite widespread even in its general features in archaic religions. Sacrifice to the sea that hunters offered using sea animals is indeed drawn to the structure that generally takes place horizontally. Moreover, here the areas of human and sacred are divided even more strictly:

in this case man does not trespass the limits of the sacred, his structural placement. It is also vital to note that the its correlation to the vertical structure that M. Eliade talks about, is not always easy to define. The sea cannot be always easily categorized into the lower world: Greeks did not identify Poseidon's sea possession with Hades' underground kingdom, and Poseidon himself unlike Hades mounts the Olympus.

**Sacrifice and cosmogony.** Inclusion of sacrifice in the structure of religion universe is accompanied by its involvement in the cosmogonic processes and presents one characteristic feature of archaic sacrifice. However, the character of connection between sacrifice and cosmogony is evaluated in an ambiguous way. M. Moss supposed that theomachy dates back to the idea of sacrifice to a god. Sacrifice to a god turns into a fight of gods, as a consequence of splitting of one and the same spirit (Moss and Hubert, 2000, p. 91). Moss thought the proof for that was the fact that theomachy was linked to sacrifice, that sometimes one of the gods was the victim, the god participating in such fights (like Veda's Soma), that it was not so seldom when a god died after the fight and that quite often the god and his adversary were co-creators (like in mitraism). In other words, Moss based his theory on the idea that on the one hand a god is a victim and a priest who brings the victim and on the other hand sacrifice to a god turns its nature from dark to luminous. However, it is necessary to note that the idea is not inherent in archaic sacrifice but in new time occultism.

M. Eliade got closer to understanding the connection between sacrifice and cosmogony. Nevertheless he was not sure neither about the role of sacrifice in the universe establishment, nor about the types of the cosmogonic acts. On the one hand, M. Eliade talks about sacrifice as an event following cosmogony and appearing in the establishment of the sacred space or reproducing

in a number of space sanctifying rites and the creation of the altar (Eliade, 2000, p. 73). In this case, sacrifice according to Eliade «endows the world with soul» and «proves» the effectiveness of the creative act, when it comes down to the ritual referring to ancient action. Besides it is there to «restore the primary unity that existed before the creation» (Eliade, 2000, p. 36, 73). On the other hand, sacrifice is said to be identical to cosmogony. Besides, M. Eliade found two types of the cosmogony: by establishing the world axis and by killing a monster or a dragon, and sacrifice does date back to the latter (Eliade, 2000, p. 277).

Talking about the character of the connection between sacrifice and cosmogony we can say that it was F. B. J. Kayper who found a way out. He takes notice of sacrifice being identical to the cosmogonic deed not only in human rituals but on the level of mythological event as well. It is important that the character of such substitution is not genetic as much as it is structural: Veda Pradgapati finds out some «water nest» on the surface of endless waters in the primary ocean, where he makes a fire which becomes the earth and the pivot (Kepner, 1986, p. 120) and thus he does something like what created Varun having something to do with the primary island that appeared on the surface of the world waters, and Indra who facilitated that island and extended it to the known borders of the land. Besides, F. B. J. Kayper shares the opinion that the primary hill has a symbolic representation in the altar for the sacrificial fire (Kayper, 1986, p.124).

Time aspect of sacrifice and universe system. In the universe system sacrifice does not only have spatial but also time characteristics. M. Moss studies profoundly sacrifice in its time aspect. As far as time is concerned sacrifice for him is a consecutive change of status of the participants as well as the victim. According to M. Moss the idea is that neither the sacrifice nor

the place, the tool or the victim possesses a proper religious status, they all refer to the sphere of the profane. And the function of the first stage of sacrifice is to endow them with such status. Due to that the sacrifice is supposed to have ritual purity (Moss and Hubert, 2000, p. 25, 28). Moss regards the priest institution first of all as an institution of mediators between humans and the sacred world, as sacrality due to its special condition and the type of activity. It is also necessary to endow the place where the sacrifice takes place and the tools with sacrality. Finally, M. Moss links the time aspect with the idea of identification between the victim and the sacrifice and the idea of the stages of transformation (status) that the sacrifice takes. Moss describes some of the stages that the victim goes through as a curve reaching the sacrality maximum, stopping there for a moment and then decreasing. As a result of such de-sacralisation the participants of the ritual have a possibility to secure the manipulations with the material component of the victim and the participants return safely into the normal profane state of the human world.

Unlike M. Moss, M. Eliade is not so interested in details about changes of the sacrality status in time. Apparently, it is due to M. Eliade's view of the time category as far as a traditional society man is concerned. M. Eliade admits the formation only in the modern profane time whereas the sacred time returned and essentially fused with the time of the world creation. Thus, the dichotomy of the profane and the sacred is more important for her as well as the idea connected with it that any sacrifice along with any other act important for a traditional man, is archetypical which means that it dates back to some ancient action, taking place in the primary epoch. That is why he asserts that «due to the paradox of the ritual any sacred space coincides with the World Centre, like time coincides with the mythical time of «inception» (Eliade, 2000, p. 36).

While characterizing the victim's transformation in a very general way, E. Leech follows M. Moss's idea. E. Leech thinks that in time aspect the victim and the sacrifice correspond to the stages of transition between states that man goes through, besides the identification is important, on the one hand as the victim's path with the path of the deceased, on the other hand – the victim and the sacrifice (Leech, 2001, p. 102). However, when referring to the materials, E. Leech studies the situation where there is not a complete identification between the victim's path and the path of the initiated. E. Leech does not talk about some specific sacrifice but about an initiation ritual where multiple sacrifices are made successively and in different ways. According to Leech's time scheme, an initiated priest goes through three stages: primary «normal» state, marginal position and final «normal» state in a new status. The first stage is different from the first because of the separation rite, and the second differs from the third due to the inclusion rite. In other words, in all the transition rites the sacrifice is employed as a landmark marking each stage (Leech, 2001, p. 97, 113).

**The relative character of inclusion of the sacrifice into the universe structure.** The structures studied above despite their differences, have one common feature: they all presuppose the correlation between the victim and the universe «centre». This essential feature characterizes the «cosmogonic» sacrifice, however not all archaic sacrifices, besides they imply the connection between the sacred world and the human world, and have an immediate relation to such «centre».

One of the aspects in the range of problems that sacrifice encompasses is that within one feast and moreover one ritual sacrifice can have different topographical localization. Whether it is an Assyrian «home cleansing ritual» or morays sacrifices mentioned above, Chuvash festive rituals, Koryak feast in honour of the «owners»

of domestic deer and in many other cases sacrifice is not only characterized by the number of victims and the types of sacrifice but also by the differences in localization. It is essential that in the aforementioned ritual there are several necessary altars: two for two underground gods and three more – one for the home god, home goddess and home guarding god (Kifishin, 2000, p. 98). Besides, there are two groups of things that are used to bring to different parts of the house: vegetative victims – to the northwest of the inner part of the house, animal victims – to the southeast side (Kifishin, 2000, p. 102-103). So, although in cases like the Assyrian sacrifice in the «home cleansing» ritual it is possible to talk about some connection between the victim and cosmogony, but it is still de-centralized, it is directed to different areas of the sacred space, which corresponds to specific parts of the world.

**Conclusion.** The connection between sacrifice and the structure of the universe is an indication of its archaic character. If space-time structure of the Old Testament sacrifice that Lech found still has its structural character of cosmic formation, then in Christ's sacrifice and

communion the notion of the universe structure can be seen only indirectly. Christian sacrifice defines the moral order not the space character: it atones for a man's sins, sanctions his New Testament with god and abolishes the sacrifice of the archaic type.

Christian sacrifice cannot be interpreted as a result of the creation but with some effort as a structural base of the universe. It also concerns sacrifice and its rudiments of other world religions: Islam, Buddhism, and the Bahá'í Faith. Nevertheless, the connection between archaic sacrifice and cosmogony has though essential but still not inherent aspect of archaic sacrifice. Archaic sacrifice cannot be classified according to the cosmologic ideas and it is also apparently impossible to understand archaic sacrifice by defining its ideas referring to cosmologic notions. For many types of archaic sacrifice it is difficult if not impossible to define some cosmological ideas. And even when such ideas can be defined, apparently they are not the main ones: sacrifice to ancestors, in the event of travelling, or successful trade, sacrifice to prophecy and when asking for cure etc.

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## **Аспекты архаического жертвоприношения: жертвоприношение в структуре вселенной**

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*В данной работе рассматриваются пути культурологической мысли в исследовании жертвоприношения. Рассмотрены некоторые черты архаического жертвоприношения как явления, в особенности соотношение жертвоприношения и заклятия, его положение в структуре мироздания. Намечены пути дальнейшего его изучения: переход от преимущественного исследования ритуального действия к рассмотрению жертвоприношения как религиозного явления.*

*Ключевые слова: жертвоприношение, архаическое жертвоприношение, ритуал, космогония, заклятие, структура.*

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