

I.

Introduction:

Did we sacrifice to the deities, or did we deify the sacrificed?

“The deep motives for human sacrifice can only be guessed at.”³

Humans and animals who are deprived of their lives in blood rituals as impersonators of godly beings - as representations, therefore, of something still to be defined - confront the science of religion with its most vexing challenges. Because in the great rituals of the Bronze Age such beings are ritually put to death, rather than being themselves the recipients of sacrifices, our understanding of the gods becomes even more blurred. Indeed, there may appear but slender hope to understand such bloody acts. The recognizance of god-victims (chapter VII) and of gods in human, animal or mixed form (chapter IX) will therefore be a central effort in the present book. Other cultural elements, generally also designated as “sacrificial victims” will be cursorily analyzed in chapters II and III, in order to better evaluate resemblances and differences between them and the rituals of god-sacrifices, i. e. of sacrificed gods.

Now there exist also secondary blood sacrifices. They appear at first sight less enigmatic. Attempts, for instance, to quiet down a roiling sea or a spewing volcano through the offering of humans or animals seem understandable to most scholars. The same can apply to the preventive pacifying of a quaking and splitting earth through “building sacrifices.” We shall see in chapters IV to VII that the catastrophic aspect of secondary blood sacrifices becomes indispensable for the understanding of those particular gods whose representatives are sacrificed in an earthly ritual but who are nevertheless of a celestial nature. The eliding, interpreting away, if not denying of these cataclysmic aspects must appear as the decisive cause of the failure of religious theory to come to terms with its most important problem.

The author feels himself committed, in his approach to sacrifice, to a decidedly conservative attitude. The retrospectively breathtaking audacity with which scholars, since the assertion of evolutionism, have stopped evaluating the subject matter of religious sacrifice, and have instead subjected them to their own bureaucratic principles, in order to then evacuate all the findings which did not match their expectations, this audacity the author could never make his own. The massive indications of overwhelming natural catastrophes which are so clearly to be seen in geological and archaeological layers (albeit only investigated in recent times), as well as in the written documents of the early high cultures, were packed into implausible constructs, turned into enigmas and allegories, ignored, ridiculed or at best - since the beginning of the 20th century -

³M. M. Rind, *Menschenopfer: Vom Kult der Grausamkeit*, Regensburg: Universitätsverlag Regensburg, 1996, S. 18.

psychoanalyzed as the discharge of confused souls.

In the course of this book we will show that the soft evolutionism of the Lyell-Darwin school has succeeded in blocking scientific research and reflection in its depth for now well over a century and a half. In the 800-page final version of van der Leeuw's *Phenomenology of Religion* (1956), which had its last edition in 1970, the terms "catastrophe," or "cataclysm" simply do not occur at all. In this work, religious-historical Darwinism attained its summit. Practically everything which was fundamental for the understanding of ancient religions was passed over without a word.⁴

The elucidation of myth, ritual and religion must now begin almost anew. For this we will need to take seriously once more especially the most shocking contents of the early religious texts. We will be holding them up therefore next to the no less catastrophically stamped finds of archaeology and estimate them anew in the light of the latter. It is well known that one advances often with the solution of an enigma - in this case, the sacrifice of celestial deities - only when one addresses it together with other enigmas from adjacent fields - in this case the geological and archaeological destruction layers, as well as the myths of cosmic revolutions of the ancient peoples.

It is well known that accepting the sacrifice of the deities, as well as the critique of such, to be a core thought of religion, remains controversial to this day. Exemplarized by Christianity and Judaism, this controversy will provide its contents to chapters X and XI.

⁴ See also G. van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion* (1956²), Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1970, passim.

II.

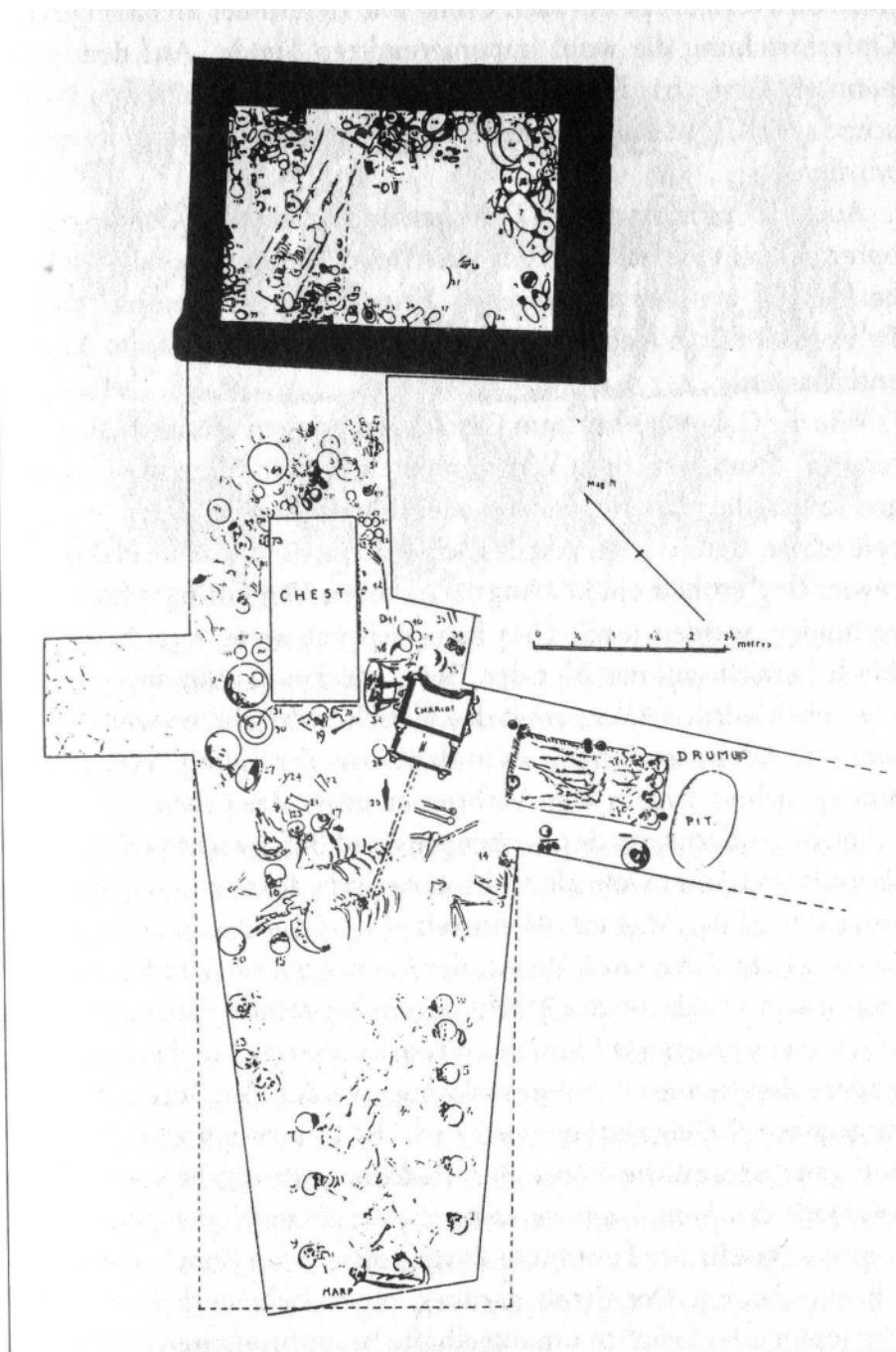
What appears easily understandable about sacrifice and what seems enigmatic? The purposes of religious theory.

“Any explanation of sacrifice is indeed a theory of religion *en miniature*.”⁵

Whereas, among sacred acts, the elaborate blood sacrifices of the Bronze Ages present us with an enigma which we must strive to solve here, we can otherwise grasp quite well the procedure of gifts being offered in veneration, or in a spirit of gratitude, even though no visible instance may seem to claim such in return for the blessings provided. We can also grasp the psychological mechanisms of the precautionary valuable gift - painfully do I give up something which to me is valuable, therefore it would be unfair if, in addition, I were to be afflicted by something painful - which for so many authors is utterly equivalent to sacrifice. The formula *do ut des* (I give, so that you should give) would be more precisely formulated - and in this case also significantly demarcated from the drama of blood sacrifice - thus: “I give something valuable so that I, who am more valuable to myself than anything else, should not be taken from myself.”

Nor do elaborate lavish festivities and gifts to the dead appear strange to us, as we know that these “loved ones” were not only loved but also hated, and therefore must be reconciled, and eventually prevented from exercising vengeance. In this category, blood sacrifice of the “secondary” type fits best. As this type of sacrifice appears in the Bronze Age along with the ritual sacrifices of gods themselves, the one cannot serve to elucidate the other. Sacrifices of “following” are found from Western Europe all the way to China and they provide archaeological sacrifice study with its most imposing finds. In the so-called royal cemetery of Ur, 74 persons are counted to have been dispatched to provide the rulers with an accompanying party into the other world (tomb 1237).

⁵ J. Z. Smith et al. (Hg.), *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995, keyword «Sacrifice», p. 948.



Ill. 1: The Early Bronze Age tomb of Queen Puabi (above) in the city of UR (RT 800) with grave-gifts including a human retinue and draft oxen.⁶

Bronze Age Greece seems to have known the “sacrifice of following” as well.

⁶ See also 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. 73.

At the very least, it has come down to us that the most valuable element in the loot of Troy - Priam's daughter Polyxene - is dispatched by the hand of Neoptolemos over the tomb of his father Achilles.⁷

So neither the concept of gift, nor that of "followers," nor any other of the procedures meant to prevent retribution which one fears from willingly or unwillingly offended powers, confront us with any particular problem or dilemma. Any act of butchering for the plain motive of obtaining food consists already in an "assault" the retaliation for which must be prevented on the spot. This can be done, for instance, through renouncing the consumption of the animal's blood, where its life is considered to be residing: "But do not eat the meat together with its blood, in which its life resides,"⁸ we are told in the story of Noah. One who relinquishes blood does not attend against life.

Such expressions of placating and appeasement appear to be very old anthropological constants. They comprise everything which is often designated as the basic religious need of our species. Already *homo sapiens neanderthalis* seems to have felt himself in obligation to his dead. He strews them with flowers and pigments⁹ and performs special ceremonies.¹⁰ Stone tools are provided to the dead in their graves.¹¹ On occasion, their brains are also eaten¹² and thus, in a much basic way, tradition itself is born. Yet the cult of the dead of *homo sapiens sapiens* (contemporary man) of the Early Stone Age already confronts researchers with difficulties through its so-called "head-burials." The dispute, whether these represent human sacrifices, or

⁷ Apollodorus 3: 151. This ritual possibly includes a reference to a disguised battle of the gods between a heavenly walkyrie, Polyxo, and a no less luminous Achilles. See also E. Wüst, «Wer war Polyxene?», in: *Gymnasium: Zeitschrift für Kultur der Antike und humanistische Bildung*, Bd. 56, 1949, p. 205ff.

⁸ 1. Moses 9: 4

⁹ See also H. Müller-Karpe, *Geschichte der Steinzeit*, München: Beck, 1974, p. 249ff.; M. Julien, «Burial in the Palaeolithic», in: C. Flon (Hg.), *The World Atlas of Archaeology*, London: Portland House, 1985, p. 28f.; A. J. Jelinek, «Western Asia during the Middle Palaeolithic», in: S. J. De Laet et al. (Hg.), *History of Humanity. Volume I: Prehistory and the Beginnings of Civilization*, Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and London: Routledge, 1994, p. 160.

¹⁰ See also K. Valoch, «Europe (Excluding the Former USSR) in the Period of *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis* and Contemporaries», in: S. J. De Laet et al. (Hg.), *History of Humanity. Volume I: Prehistory and the Beginnings of Civilization*, Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) und London: Routledge, 1994, p. 141.

¹¹ See also a. o. E. O. James, *Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East: An Archaeological and Documentary Study*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1958, p. 32f.

¹² For an overview, see also a. o. M. M. Rind, *Menschenopfer: Vom Kult der Grausamkeit*, Regensburg: Universitätsverlag Regensburg, 1996, p. 101.

merely peculiar burial rites, is still undecided. Holes in the crania of the dead may indicate cannibalistic removal of the brain matter, as for the Neanderthals, or they may indicate human sacrifice.



Ill. 2: Representation of the sacrifice of Polyxene by Neoptolemos over the tomb of his father Achilles (adapted from a vase painting).

Maybe looking back to the Late Stone Age that followed will bring us further in our enquiry. Here for the first time we are confronted with the rendering of high-ranking - and probably formerly feared and envied - clan members as statuesque seated figures.¹³ After the decay of the dead, their memory is perpetuated in front of images, which can be mere clay or metal masks. This monumental tradition does not disappear later on and is accounted for endlessly in Etruscan funerary culture.¹⁴ Nowadays, in some Mediterranean cultures, photographs of the dead, displayed on

¹³ See also a.o. S. Soles, «Social Ranking in Prepalatial Cemeteries», in: E. B. French, K. A. Wardle (Hg.), *Problems in Greek Prehistory*, Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1988, p. 49 ff.

¹⁴ See also a. o. L. Bonfante, «Daily Life and Afterlife», in: Idem (Hg.), *Etruscan Life and Afterlife: A Handbook of Etruscan Studies*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986, p. 232 ff.

their tombstones, represent a modern continuation of such immortalization. Possibly, the mysterious head-burials of the Early Stone Age merely provide us with the earliest instance of funeral monuments known to our species.

The “corpse” background to the skull memorials of the Early Stone Age, and then the tomb statues of the Late Stone Age, will occupy us extensively when we consider the later god-statues, the origins of which we will attempt to explain. They, too, are memorials. In them, too, it is question of a memory of someone who has come to die. But these dead have not died from old age or in heroic action. They have lost their life in the circumstances of ritual blood sacrifices, which will also have to be explained.

Loving gifts to forces considered incorporeal or superhuman, which are perceived as dangerous or as protective - as bad or good spirits, that is - are probably no less ancient than the cult of ancestors and of their images. That spirits appeared to the mind in human- or animal form surely has to do with the fact - entirely congruent with the animistic religious conception taught by Edward Tylor¹⁵ and his German disciple Erwin Rohde¹⁶ - that humans and animals appear after their death in the dreams of their loved ones, neighbors or masters, that they therefore “visit them” in an immaterial, one might say, soul-shaped, form. The concept of life continued after death, eventually, of the eternal existence of the soul - the whole spectrum of belief in spirits and in ghosts included - are illuminatingly explained by the recourse to the occurrence of dream images.

Yet the ceremonies of blood rituals concern themselves with beings that are really alive, not with spirits. Those put to death in this manner may well, later on, reappear in dreams, and be held to be spirits. These evanescent apparitions are by no means sufficient to explain the ritual murders. Moreover, the sheer apparition of a person or animal in a dream does not sufficiently explain the worshiping of such figures. The crushing, all-destructive power of the gods - their planetary and cometary character - does not simply come into existence because the dead appear in our dreams. Just as the sheer existence of celestial bodies can hardly explain turning them into gods, not to mention the well-documented terror which they elicited in ancient peoples.

In the varied ceremonies of appeasement, the intervention of some who specialize in the evacuation of feelings of guilt was called for. From the beginning,

¹⁵ See also E. B. Tylor, *Die Anfänge der Kultur: Untersuchungen über die Entwicklung der Mythologie, Philosophie, Religion, Kunst und Sitte* (1865), Leipzig: C. F. Winter'sche Verlagshandlung, 1873, insbesondere Teil I, p. 433 f.

¹⁶ See E. Rohde, *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen* (1890/94), 2 Bände, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1903.

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¹⁶ See E. Rohde, *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen* (1890/94), 2 Bände, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1903.

these resembled the Shamans,¹⁷ who still today are encountered in tribal communities, where they not only carry on healing activities but also - bewinged by intoxicating mushrooms and other substances - are able to “fly” to other worlds. Thus making a full-time occupation out of what their fellow men achieve only occasionally and off-schedule in their sleep, when they live through their own dream-images in alien worlds. The shamans establish a targeted relationship with the dead and with other forces, the ‘apparition’ of which survivors experience in dreams and construe as an attempt at establishing contact.

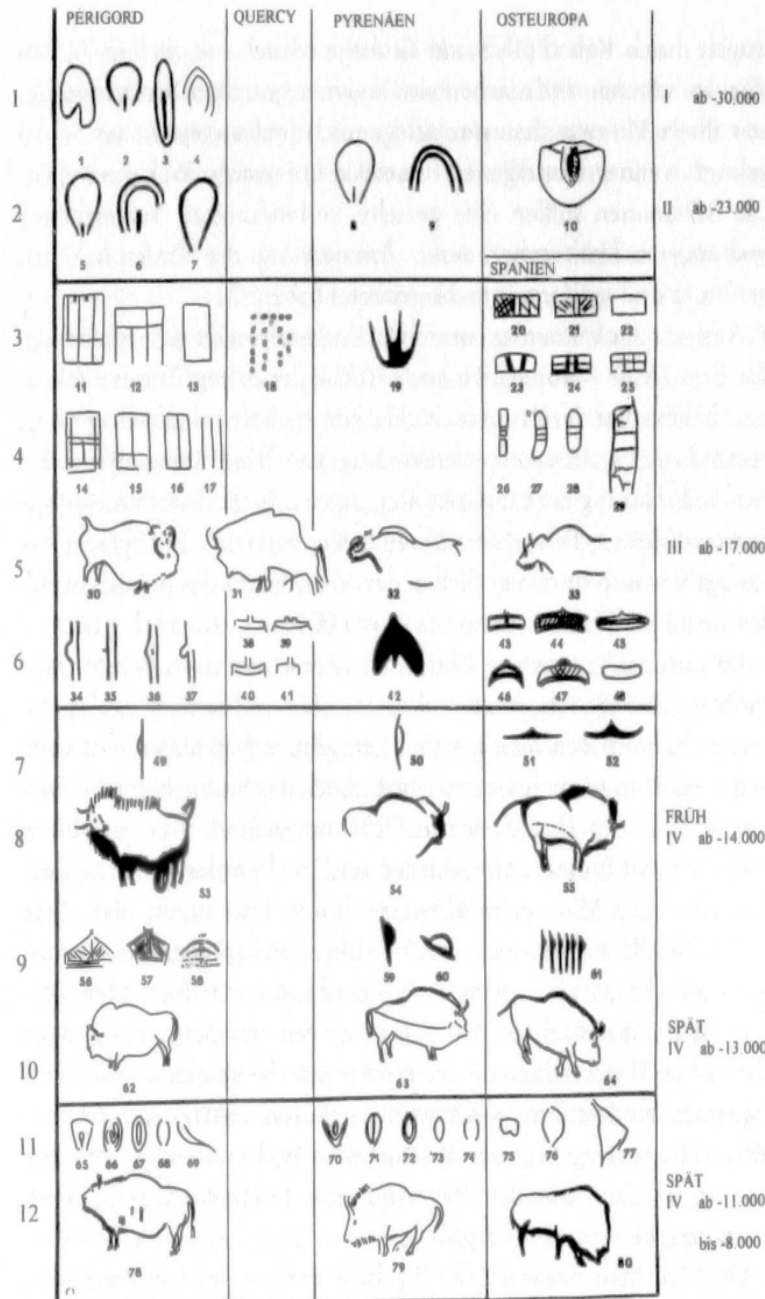
From those gifted for shamanism would probably emerge later - in the Bronze Age - some of the first recruits of priesthood. For, before the Bronze Age, this sacral group existed no more as a steady profession than did stable cultic monuments.¹⁸ To explain the religious impulses and the existence of a not yet professionalized religious personnel during pre- and early history, it will suffice to refer to the feelings of guilt which the human species is able to create out of its feelings of hate.¹⁹

As it happens that the spilled blood of a human is the surest indication that he has been the victim of an aggression and that his readiness to vengeance has been triggered, so there can never exist towards blood, even from the earliest beginnings, a feeling of equanimity or serenity. Even the blood of women menstruating or giving birth was not allowed to be dissociated from the blood spent in violence and it could not be held to be harmless. Men may have come to understand that these female bleedings did not originate in their own doing, but they could not help themselves to secure exculpation through ritual conciliatory gestures in front of images of female sexual organs or of complete female figures. Vaginal cults belong therefore from the beginning, just like the rituals of reconciliation targeted at the dead or at the animals killed in the hunt, to the ritual repertoire of contemporary man (*Cro-magnon evtl. homo sapiens sapiens*).

¹⁷ See also for instance Arctic Institute of North America (Hg.), *Studies in Siberian Sha-manism*, Anthropology of the North: Translation from Russian Sources, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1963 sowie E. Pasztor, «Shamanism and North American Indian Art», in: Z. P. Mathews, A. Jonaitis (Hg.), *Native North American Art History*, Palo Alto/CA: Peek Publications, 1982, p. 7 ff.

¹⁸ See also a. o. E. Porada, *Man and Images in the Ancient Near East*, Wakefield/RI und London: Moyer Bell, 1995, p. 30.

¹⁹ See S. Freud, «Trauer und Melancholie» (1916), in: Idem, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. X, Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1946, S. 427-446.



Ill. 3.: Realistic (lines 1+2) and abstract (lines 3+4) portraits of vulvae as the only preserved artistic forms of expression for the first 13,000 years (according to conventional dating) of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, which continued even later (lines 6,7,9+11) next to animal representations to deliver most of the aesthetic diet.²⁰

The pictographic witnesses of these very ancient performances should therefore

²⁰ Adapted from C. Gamble, *The Palaeolithic Settlement of Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, S. 229 as well as A. Leroi-Gourhan, «The Evolution of Palaeolithic Art», in: *Scientific American*, Bd. 218, 1968, Nr. 2, p. 59ff.

not be automatically attributed to a cult of maternity,²¹ which, as worship rendered to the potency to give birth, would be entirely self-evident and should not necessitate any further explanation. They could also go back to women bleeding, and therefore appearing to be injured. In this case it would precisely not be fertility itself which would have been the cause of fear, but complications in giving birth. The natural and normal course of things only rarely are the occasion of disruption. Yet suddenly occurring irregularities with regard to maternity would bring consternation no less than when such concerned rivers or disaster-bringing celestial bodies.

Among religious practices, the common prayer also does not offer any particular problems in understanding. The “give me” and the “forgive me” are only marginally different from each other in the economy of the soul. The one praying for gifts often has an inkling that these have in fact been withheld from him up to now on grounds of his unworthiness. The promise to atone for the latter is therefore often immediately added.

Also the posture of kneeling and of embracing the nether extremities, through which the powerful are supplicated for grace or for the non-exercise of their discontent must appear to be as old as humanity itself. Even today such gestures of subordination occur in real life as well as in religious life. But nobody would think of deriving complex blood rituals from those gestures.

From all these pervasive ritual forms accompanying the history of humanity, only these very ceremonies, which become dominant in the Bronze Age in many religions of the earth, consisting of the killing of humans and animals who, before their violent end find themselves decorated and covered with proofs of respect - who are, therefore, veritably taking on roles - do not offer themselves for an easy explanation. For instance, ritual commands from the *Odyssey*, such as: “Let someone call the master goldsmith Laerkes, so that he may cover with gold the horns of the [sacrificial] bull,”²² remain to this day difficult to interpret. After their death, the victims of ritual sacrifice are also granted the traditional conciliatory gestures, i.e. the weeping and lamenting over their corpses. These will become extraordinarily revealing instructors when we attempt to understand the creation of the gods. The sacredly-healing murder itself, though, is fed by resources which have not been sufficiently uncovered yet: “How are we ever, though, despite all the theories of sacrifice, be made to understand that it could be pleasing to God, or to the gods, that

²¹ The author has no issue with the chronological succession of motives in human art and its - still enduring - preeminence of female genitals. It is merely in regard of the dominant belief in an inordinate number of millennia which the present human being is supposed to have needed in order to express vaginas with however slightly increasing exactitude that he has tried to set the archaeologico-stratigraphic record straight. See also G. Heinsohn, *Wie alt ist das Menschengeschlecht? Stratigraphische Grundlegung der Paläoanthropologie und Vorgeschichte* (1991), Gräfelfing: Mantis, 1996.

²² *Odyssee* III: 425-7438.

humans or animals should be put to death and consumed in their honor?”²³ Such complaint from the religious sciences course like a leitmotiv through scholarly literature. As a solace for one’s own impotence at finding an explanation, one then adds: “Clearly, the original significance of the murder has gone lost.”²⁴

Such perplexity is not only limited to those areas of Europe, Asia and Africa which have been investigated sometimes since Antiquity. The decapitation and heart-extraction rituals of the Pre-Columbian American ceremonial tournaments steadfastly elude an explanation making full good sense. “Mexican ball games fulfilled a religious function, but there is no consensus about how this function must be interpreted.”²⁵

Even less than through blood-sacrifices, modern religious research will allow itself to be puzzled by the appearance of deities in animal-, mixed, and, especially, in human form. Most authors address this subject with preconceived representations of already fully elaborated godheads, that is, they project their own belief in God onto early humanity. Much more than the premise that man - by reason of his childish inferiority in regard to mighty parental figures²⁶ - is freighted with a psychological potential for respect of the “higher” (as well as a potential of rebellion against it) cannot be derived from this. This general mental and emotional potential translates itself naturally onto the representations of the godly, yet the fully formed god remains “a late apparition in the history of religion.”²⁷ His time became due “one day”, it seems, because it had become a “progressive step” that humans “in the contemplation of their own image”²⁸ had become aware of themselves. These are heavily assertive formulations. They stem from Klaus Heinrich, the teacher of religious science of the present author. Still, one would like to know more about the circumstances of the development of images.

²³ A. E. Jensen, *Mythos und Kult bei den Naturvölkern: Religionswissenschaftliche Betrachtungen* (1951), with a preface by E. Haberland, München: dtv, 1991, p. 236.

²⁴ J. de Vries, *Perspectives in the History of Religion*, Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1977, p. 198/200/207.

²⁵ U. Simri, «The Religious and Magical Function of Ball Games in Various Cul-tures», in: *Proceedings of the First International Seminar on the History of Physi-cal Education and Sport*, Netanya/Israel, 1969, p. 7; against such perplexity, see W. Müllen, «The Mesoamerican Record», in: *Pensee*, Bd. 4, Nr. 4, 1974, pp. 34-44: «The ritual ball-game was in imitation of the heavenly ball-game that played itself out at the time of the destruction of the world, when Sun and Moon vanquished the lords of darkness» (p. 38 f.). See also M. Knaust, «Das rituelle Ballspiel der präkolumbianischen Völker Mesoamerikas», in: *Vorzeit - Frühzeit — Gegenwart*, Bd. 6, Nr. 2, 1994, S. 62-81 as well as the comprehensive presentation of B. J. Peiser, *Der Ursprung des mesoamerikanischen Ballspiels*, Liverpool: John Moores University/School of Human Sciences, 1995, Computerausdruck. See also B. J. Peiser, «Die kosmische Symbolik des mesoamerikanischen Ballspiels: Eine naturgeschichtliche Interpretation», in: F. van der Merve (Hg.), *Sport as Symbol, Symbols in Sport*, Sankt Augustin: Akademia, 1996, p. 133-146.

²⁶ «The remaining distance is easily covered by the fact that this creator-god is forthrightly called Father. Psychoanalysis concludes that it is indeed the father, in his grandiose appearance, such as he once appeared to the small child. Religious man represents to himself the creation of the world as being the creation of himself.” S. Freud, «Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse» (1933), in: Idem, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. XV, Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1950, p. 175.

²⁷ See G. van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1933, p. 87

²⁸ See K. Heinrich, *Dahlemer Vorlesungen 2: Anthropomorphe*, Basel und Frankfurt: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1986, p. 39.

Considering the ever persistent opaqueness of the concepts of gods and sacrifice, it is hardly surprising that among scholars a defiant “insistence on the incomprehensible”²⁹ aspects of Antiquity finds supporters in ever more increasing numbers: “The non-derivability of the religious thing in itself, which is expressed in phrases such as ‘the primordial experience of the sacred,’ however unsatisfactorily rendered, is as much part of the given as is the spilling of blood, which science must admit into its field of awareness, but which it cannot work itself through to the very end.”³⁰

Possibly, this resigned acceptance of the “given” is not yet majoritary, but it is ever more strongly represented. For a teaching position as a professor, crowing about the so-called “incomprehensible” and the necessary limits of all knowledge may look sufficient and attractive enough. But with science, such sclerosis cannot agree. Over time, it can elude only with difficulty its duty to knowledge. And for science it remains significant, once and for all, that blood sacrifice and the images of gods constitute the core of the great systems of belief. The present text, in view of its necessary brevity, can only try for an elemental sorting out of the theory of religion.

²⁹ Vgl. T. Ribi, «Alttertumswissenschaft als Kulturanthropologie: Ein Symposium für den Gräzisten Walter Burkert», in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung: Feuilleton*, 23. /24..3.1996, p.46.

³⁰ J. Ross, «Griechische Passion: Walter Burkerts Anthropologie des Opfers in der Antike», in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung: Geisteswissenschaften*, 27. 3. 1996, p. N 5.