

ON MEANING AND MANTRAS
ESSAYS IN HONOR OF FRITS STAAL



Frits Staal at the 2011 *agnicayana* in Kerala, India.
Photos courtesy of Michael Witzel.

On Meaning and Mantras
Essays in Honor of Frits Staal

Edited by

George Thompson
and
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Institute of Buddhist Studies and
BDK America, Inc.
2016

Contemporary Issues in Buddhist Studies

Series Editor, Richard K. Payne

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First Printing, 2016
ISBN: 978-1-886439-64-1
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2016962174

Published by
BDK America, Inc.
1673 School Street
Moraga, California 94553

Printed in the United States of America

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Agniṣṭoma and the Nature of Sacrifice

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Ever since the studies of Sylvain Lévi in 1898¹ and Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss in 1899,² it has been taken for granted that the victim in a Vedic sacrifice is a substitute for the sacrificer.³ In this paper I argue that while this may often be true, it is not always the case. In certain sacrifices the victim does not represent the sacrificer but his enemy. The *Agniṣṭoma* will serve as example.

The outline of this sacrifice is well known.⁴ The soma plant (or rather its stalks) are “bought” from a “soma merchant,” who is in reality either a brahman or a *śūdra* who plays that role. The purchase follows on a prescribed process of barter, and the payment is a one-year-old brown cow. At this point the “soma merchant” is beaten. The soma itself is henceforth treated not as a plant but is personified as a king: It is placed on a throne and hospitality is offered to “him.” The pressing of the soma stalks to extract the liquid at the end is referred to as “killing.”⁵

The victim in this sacrifice is thus clearly the soma itself. Is it plausible to maintain that “King Soma” is a substitute for the sacrificer? Nothing in the texts suggests anything of the kind, as far as I know. Quite the contrary, the strange way in which King Soma is obtained suggests something altogether different. It suggests that the king of a neighboring and therefore inimical territory is obtained by unfriendly means. Once in the possession of the sacrificer, “he” is well treated but yet does not escape death as a sacrificial victim.

This reading of the *Agniṣṭoma* does not require advanced skills of symbolic interpretation. The texts are suggestive enough. Moreover, we know that similar types of sacrifices were practiced in other parts of the world, with real human victims. We know that the Aztecs, for example, obtained their human victims by unfriendly means (i.e., warfare with other groups), that they preferred victims of high rank, that they treated their captured enemies well until the day of their inevitable sacrificial death.⁶

It is not even necessary to leave India in order to find sacrificial practices with a human victim. Vedic literature itself mentions the *puruṣamedha*, “human sacrifice.” Here, as in the *Agniṣṭoma*, the victim (a male human being) is bought from his family for a price of a thousand cows and a hundred horses. The victim must belong to one of the two highest classes, brahman or warrior (*kṣatriya*). Before being finally put to death, he is relatively free for a year and can pursue most of his wishes (with some exceptions, such as engaging in sexual intercourse).⁷ It is relatively unimportant for our present purposes to determine whether the *puruṣamedha* was ever actually performed in ancient India; many scholars think it was not.⁸ It gives expression, once again, to the idea that a high-ranking person from a presumably inimical community is obtained to be sacrificed.

If this is, in outline, the (or a) correct way of interpreting the *Agniṣṭoma*, the view that the victim is always a substitute for the sacrificer needs adjustment. I propose that in certain sacrifices the victim is a substitute for the sacrificer, while in others he may be regarded as a substitute for his enemy.

It may be objected that in most modern interpretations of sacrifice there is no place for enemies. In answer to this objection, it must be pointed out that there is plenty of space for enemies in Vedic sacrificial literature. The notion of killing enemies, or rivals, is frequent even in connection with Vedic sacrifices that do not carry out or hint at inimical actions. Instead, the sacrifice that on first glance seems “innocuous” turns out to be *a means to kill the enemy*. H. W. Bodewitz writes about this:

It is remarkable that killing persons who hate the sacrificer or his priest plays an important role in the Vedic ritualistic texts. . . . The one who will be killed is called a (hating) rival (*bhrātṛvya*) and there is no mentioning of an official war. In a rather old prose text like the [*Taittirīya Saṃhitā*] we often read about someone “who hates us and whom we hate.” A later text like the [*Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*], in which such a killing is frequently mentioned, the stereotyped expression is “he who knows thus kills his hating rival.” In the [*Taittirīya Saṃhitā*] often gods are invoked to kill the one who is hated and hates the sacrificer or his priest. . . . In the [*Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*] the killing is mostly caused by, or based on, an incantation. By (or with the help of) sacrifice the rival becomes killed. Often one also tries to obtain his cattle in this way. A particular arrangement or way of singing the Sāmans in this Sāmavedic text guarantees the death of the rival. This ritualistic magic is also current in the Yajurvedic [*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*]. Whether this killing is only realized by magic or should be supported by this ritualistic magic in a fight is not clearly indicated in the texts.⁹

It must be admitted that there may be no Vedic text that explicitly identifies the sacrificial victim with the enemy. Moreover, there are sacrifices whose confrontational nature is beyond doubt, but that culminate nonetheless in the slaughter of a victim who is a substitute for the sacrificer. An example is the horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*), which establishes the sacrificer's superiority over his neighbors; the victim is not one of these neighbors but a horse. The chief queen performs sexual intercourse with the horse, thus identifying it as a substitute for the sacrificing king.

If there is no explicit evidence in the Vedic texts and their auxiliary literature that the victim in certain sacrifices is a substitute for the enemy (or even the enemy himself), does this mean that this notion is mistaken? Must we retract this theory altogether and return to the earlier one in which the sacrificial victim is always a substitute for the sacrificer?

I think we must not do so until we have heard the testimony of some other brahmans from approximately the same period, the authors of the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁰ The main story of this epic was told during a snake sacrifice (*sarpasattra*) with the goal of destroying all snakes. The fact that the sacrifice did not succeed is irrelevant for our present purpose. Christopher Minkowski sums up how this sacrifice came about:

The story of Janamejaya's *sattra* belongs to the Āstika parvan of the *Mahābhārata*'s first book (1.45–53). The events of the Āstika parvan, the curse of Kadrū (1.18), the death of Parikṣit (1.36–40), and the birth of Āstika (1.33–44), culminate in the story of the snake *sattra*, which begins with Janamejaya learning that his father Parikṣit was killed by the serpent Takṣaka. Seeking revenge, Janamejaya asks his priests whether they know a rite that would enable him to propel Takṣaka and his relations into blazing fire (1.47.4). The priests reply that there is a rite that will accomplish such a task, created by the gods especially for Janamejaya (*tvadartham devanirmitam*), known as the *sarpasattra*, and described in the Purāṇic lore (*purāṇe kathyate*) (1.47.6). Janamejaya is the only man eligible to sponsor this rite, and the priests have the training to perform it (1.47.7). Janamejaya agrees and orders the priests to prepare (1.47.8–9).¹¹

This sacrifice may not fit into any of the traditional Vedic categories, least of all the *sattra*, yet it is clear that it is nonetheless a sacrifice in which the victims are also the enemies of the sacrificer. This is not the only such example from the *Mahābhārata*. Two famous passages compare the epic war in the *Mahābhārata* itself with sacrifice. Duryodhana, addressing his father, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, says the following:

I am not putting the burden of war on you, or on Droṇa, or on Aśvatthāman, or on Saṃjaya, or on Vikarṇa, or on Kāmbhoja, or on Bāhlika, Satyavrata, Purumitra, Bhūriśravas, or any others of your party, when I make this challenge! I and Karṇa, father, have laid out the sacrifice of war (*raṇayajña*) and here we stand consecrated *with Yudhiṣṭhira as the victim*, bull of the Bharatas. This chariot is the altar, this sword the spoon, this club the ladle, this armor the *sadas*. My steeds are the four sacrificial priests, my arrows the *darbha* grass, my fame the oblation! Having offered up ourselves in war to Vaivasvata, O king, we shall triumphantly return, covered with glory, our enemies slain. I, Karṇa, and my brother Duḥśāsana, we three, father, will kill Pāṇḍavas in battle. I shall kill the Pāṇḍavas and rule the earth. I should rather surrender my life, wealth, and realm, steadfast king, than ever dwell together with the Pāṇḍavas! We shall not cede to the Pāṇḍavas as much land as you can prick with the point of a sharp needle, father!¹²

In this comparison, Duryodhana is the sacrificer and Yudhiṣṭhira the victim. Clearly Yudhiṣṭhira is Duryodhana's enemy, but this appears to be no obstacle to his role also as the sacrificial victim. Yudhiṣṭhira's role in this imaginary sacrifice is parallel to that of the snakes in Janamejaya's *sattra* and of King Soma in the *Agniṣṭoma*.

We know from the remainder of the *Mahābhārata* story that Duryodhana's imagined sacrifice never took place. Yudhiṣṭhira was not killed in battle, while Duryodhana himself (along with Karṇa) were vanquished. It is interesting, that Duryodhana figures as sacrificial victim in another comparison, this one made by Karṇa, who also compared the approaching battle with a sacrifice but one in which sacrificer and victim were identical:

Vārṣṇeya, the Dhārtarāṣṭra will hold a grand sacrifice of war (*śastrayajña*). Of this sacrifice you shall be the Witness, Janārdana, and you shall be the Adhvaryu priest at the ritual. The Terrifier with the monkey standard stands girt as the Hotar; Gaṇḍīva will be the ladle; the bravery of men the sacrificial butter. The *aindra*, *pāśupata*, *brāhma*, and *sthūṇākaraṇa* missiles will be the spells employed by the Left-handed Archer. Saubhadra, taking after his father, if not overtaking him, in prowess, will act perfectly as the Grāvastut priest. Mighty Bhīma will be the Udgātar and Prastotar, that tiger-like man who with his roars on the battlefield finishes off an army of elephants. The eternal king, law-spirited Yudhiṣṭhira, well-versed in recitations and oblations, will act as the Brahmān. The sounds of the conches, the drums, the kettle drums, and the piercing lion roars will be the Subrahmaṇā invocation. Mādrī's two glorious sons Nakula and Sahadeva of great valor will fill the office of the Śamitar priest. The clean chariot spears with their spotted staffs will serve as the sacrificial poles at this sacrifice, Janārdana.

The eared arrows, hollow reeds, iron shafts and calf-tooth piles, and the javelins will be the Soma jars, and the bows the strainers. Swords will be the potsherds, skulls the Puroḍāśa cakes, and blood will be the oblation at this sacrifice, Kṛṣṇa. The spears and bright clubs will be the kindling and enclosing sticks; the pupils of Droṇa and Kṛpa Śāradvata the Sadasyas. The arrows shot by the Gāṇḍīva bowman, the great warriors, and Droṇa and his son will be the pillows. Sātyaki shall act as Pratiprasthātar, *the Dhārtarāṣṭra as the Sacrificer (dīkṣita)*, his great army as the Wife. Mighty Ghaṭotkaca will be the Śamitar when this Overnight (*atirātra*) Sacrifice is spun out, strong-armed hero. Majestic Dhṛṣṭadyumna shall be the sacrificial fee when the fire rite takes place, he who was born from the fire.

The insults I heaped on the Pāṇḍavas, to please Duryodhana, those I regret. When you see me cut down by the Left-handed Archer, it will be the Re-piling of the Fire of this¹³ sacrifice. When the Pāṇḍava drinks the blood of Duḥśāsana, bellowing his roar, it will be the Soma draught. When the two Pāncālyas fell Droṇa and Bhīṣma, that will be the Conclusion of the sacrifice, Janārdana. *When the mighty Bhīmasena kills Duryodhana, then the great sacrifice of the Dhārtarāṣṭra will end.* The weeping of the gathered daughters-in-law and granddaughters-in-law, whose masters, sons, and protectors have been slain, with the mourning of Gāndhārī at the sacrificial site now teeming with dogs, vultures, and ospreys, will be the Final Bath of this sacrifice, Janārdana.¹⁴

Many of the detailed comparisons here are quite fanciful. However, one identification in particular is significant: the sacrificer, Duryodhana, is also the victim. Here, then, the authors of the *Mahābhārata* give the identification we would expect to find on the basis of our reading of Lévi and Hubert and Mauss. But why did they not do so in the earlier comparison, the one spoken by Duryodhana himself?

The answer I propose is straightforward. This identification does not figure in the earlier comparison because sacrificer and victim are not always identical, either in the imagination of the authors of the *Mahābhārata* or in Vedic sacrifice itself. To be precise, in some sacrifices the victim is or stands in for the sacrificer, while in other sacrifices the victim is or stands in for the enemy of the sacrificer. King Soma stands for the enemy (or an enemy) of the sacrificer. Only this way can we make sense of the strange treatment of the material substance of the *soma*.

I have assumed in the preceding that the *Mahābhārata's* authors may or may not have had detailed knowledge of all the specifics of Vedic sacrifice; but they did have an understanding of what sacrifice is all about. This understanding implied that in certain sacrifices the victim is or represents the enemy of the sacrificer. This vision finds expression in the

story of the snake sacrifice, as we have seen. It also finds expression in other stories; for instance, in what the *Mahābhārata* tells us about King Jarāsandha of Magadha:

After he had defeated them all, [Jarāsandha] imprisoned the kings in his mountain corral, Girivraja, as a lion imprisons great elephants in a cave of the Himālaya. King Jarāsandha wants to sacrifice the lords of the earth, for it was after he had worshiped the Great God that he defeated the kings on the battlefield. Whenever he defeated kings in battle, he took them in fetters to his own city and built a corral for men!¹⁵

About these imprisoned kings we read:

What joy of life is left to the kings who are sprinkled and cleansed in the house of Paśupati as sacrificial animals. . . ?¹⁶

It is true that Kṛṣṇa criticizes King Jarāsandha for wishing to perform a human sacrifice, claiming that human sacrifice has never taken place in the past.¹⁷ It hardly matters whether or not Kṛṣṇa's claim is correct. He does not accuse Jarāsandha for failing to understand what sacrifice is all about, and indeed, it appears that Jarāsandha understood sacrifice very well.

We may conclude that there are two types of sacrifice distinguished from each other in that in one type the victim is or stands in for the *sacrificer*, while in the other type the victim is or stands in for the *enemy of the sacrificer*. I propose to look upon these two types as applicable not only in India but wherever sacrifices are performed. We have already seen that a particularly good example of the type of sacrifice in which the victim is or stands in for the enemy of the sacrificer is provided by the Aztecs, but there are more examples from outside India. I have collected some of this evidence in a recent article.¹⁸ I drew attention to the social aspect of the need to sacrifice: sacrifices sanctify, in the sense of anchoring in a higher reality, relations of superiority and inferiority. Where the victim is or stands in for the sacrificer, the sacrificer solemnly sanctifies his inferior position, normally with respect to a higher, non-human being. Where the victim is or stands in for the enemy, the sacrificer sanctifies his superiority with respect to that enemy.¹⁹

Here I wish to concentrate on a consequence of this position with which I have only superficially dealt so far. It concerns the kinds of victims that are actually sacrificed, most notably animals. If the victim stands for the sacrificer, one may expect that the sacrificed entity is something or someone of value to him, something he owns or that is

dear to him. If the sacrificial victim is an animal, it should be an animal that the sacrificer owns, in other words, a domestic animal.

If, on the other hand, the victim stands for the enemy of the sacrificer or is itself his enemy, the situation is rather different. In principle, anything that is dear to the enemy may do as substitute, at least in theory. This might conceivably be an animal that belongs to the enemy, which then again, by its nature, would be a domesticated animal. The whole procedure might be executed on such a level of abstraction that no real enemy is left. The *Agniṣṭoma* shows that in such cases an imaginary enemy—in this case, King Soma—will do, and the imaginary enemy is ceremoniously put to death.

There is no obvious place in this understanding for the sacrifice of wild animals. And indeed, the question whether wild animals can ever be sacrificed is contested. Jonathan Z. Smith, for example, writes:

I know of no unambiguous instance of animal sacrifice performed by hunters. *Animal sacrifice appears to be, universally, the ritual killing of a domesticated animal by agrarian or pastoralist societies.*²⁰

Beattie and Hénaff express themselves similarly.²¹ Smith dedicates the end of his article to a discussion of the putative evidence for the use of wild animals in sacrifice. He writes, “the only contemporary putative evidence for a wild animal being used in sacrifice is the circum-polar bear festival.”²² In discussing this claim, Smith makes a number of observations that are worth repeating:

In fact, the bear festival does not fit, although it was used as the hermeneutic key to interpret the Paleolithic remains. (a) The peoples who practice the bear festivals are pastoralists, not hunters. . . . (b) In the circum-polar bear ritual, the animal is domesticated for a period of years before being slain. (c) In the case of the Ainu (for whom there is the best ethnographic documentation), both the most distinguished native Ainu anthropologist, K. Kindaichi. . . , and the bear festival’s most distinguished recent interpreter, J. M. Kitagawa. . . , vigorously deny that the ritual should be classified as a sacrifice. . . .

On the issue of Paleolithic sacrifices, the evaluation of the evidence has been one of steady retreat from confidence to uncertainty. For example, J. Maringer, who confidently declared in 1952 that “the practice of sacrificing the head, skull and long bones of animals survived from earliest times right up to the Upper Paleolithic” . . . , retreated by 1968 to declaring that sacrifice is not evident in Lower and Middle Paleolithic deposits, and that it is possible to speak “with relatively great certainty” (“*mit mehr oder minder grosserer Sicherheit*”) of animal sacrifices only in the Upper Paleolithic. . . . Yet even

here, strong alternative hypotheses that account for the “evidence” as non-sacrificial have been proposed. . . .

The fact that sacrifices are invariably of domesticated animals in contrast to wild ones (and hence from a different “sphere” than religious practices associated with hunters or Paleolithic man) was already quite properly insisted upon by L. Franz [in 1937]. Several months of checking in a variety of ethnographic monographs have turned up no exceptions. Here, I distinguish between killing an animal in sacrifice and the postmortem offering of some portion of an animal routinely killed for food. The latter is certainly present among some hunters and gatherers.²³

We will study these observations in more detail below. First I must point out that despite these assertions, a few more recent scholars continue to assume that there were animal sacrifices—i.e., sacrifices of wild animals—in the remote past. An example is Michael Witzel’s recent book, *The Origins of the World’s Mythologies, a tour de force* that presents a sustained argument that human mythologies can be traced back to a time before our ancestors left Africa.²⁴ Mythology is not, however, our concern at present. We are rather concerned with Witzel’s discussion of the origins and development of sacrifice. He writes:

The origins and development of sacrifice are related to forms of shamanism by a series of progressions, from the Stone Age hunt to recent and current practices. . . .

The shamanistic aspect of the religion of the Stone Age hunter societies presupposes, in its Laurasian version, the dismemberment and/or sacrifice of a primordial deity. Examples include that of the giant, such as the southern “Chinese” (Miao) Pangu, the Vedic Indian Puruṣa, the Old Norse Ymir, the Roman Remus, the Egyptian Osiris, and the Mesopotamian Kingu (and Tiamat).²⁵ The giant has a human correspondent, man. In many if not most societies, however, human sacrifice is substituted by that of other animals: dog, goat, bull, boar, reindeer, bear, and more recently, horse. Or in the classical Vedic Indian order of “the five domestic animals”: man, horse, cow, sheep, and goat, while the wild animals are not considered; this is justified in a myth reported in a late Vedic text.²⁶

So far this agrees by and large with what I have said about sacrifice above, and most particularly with the first type of sacrifice in which a sacrificer (human or divine) puts himself or a substitute for himself to death. One detail, however, is disturbing: the presence of nondomesticated animals, most notably the bear, in Witzel’s discussion. Is there such a thing as a bear sacrifice? Smith remarked that “the only contemporary

putative evidence for a wild animal being used in sacrifice is the circum-polar bear festival," and stated his reservations about this.

Like Smith before him, Witzel refers to the Ainu bear sacrifice. It is time for us to refine our theoretical reflections and, armed with these, turn to an inspection of this sacrifice.

It is clear from Smith's passage, cited above, that at least part of the problem connected with the use of wild animals in sacrifice has to do with what exactly we understand by "sacrifice." The preceding reflections can be of use here. If we think of sacrifice as the "ritualized," i.e., holistic and ceremonial²⁷ destruction either of the sacrificer or his substitute, or of the enemy or his substitute, how might wild animals fit in? One possible answer is that they might become sacrificial victims after being caught. They might then be considered the property of the person(s) who caught them, the sacrificer, and become his/their substitute. Alternatively, the wild animal, once caught, might be treated as is the soma plant in the *Agniṣṭoma*: as a vanquished enemy who will be ceremoniously put to death. Being killed in the hunt, on the other hand, does *not* turn wild animals into sacrificial victims, because at the time of their capture they belong to no one, least of all the sacrificer. High-ranking warriors of a neighboring king were caught and sacrificed by the Aztecs and others, but the Aztecs did not just kill warriors on the battlefield, rather they (like King Jarāsandha) caught them and held them as prisoners until the time they were ritually put to death. Slaughtering enemy soldiers in battle would not count as sacrifice. Similarly, killing a wild animal during a hunt is not sacrifice. For it to be sacrifice, the animal has to be captured alive and put to death ritually, after some interval of time. The case of King Soma is similar: the *soma* is obtained, kept, and finally "killed" in ritually prescribed manner. To say it once again, merely killing a wild animal on a hunt cannot be seen as animal sacrifice.

Let us push the analysis somewhat further. Theoretically, one can imagine several scenarios. Wild animals might play a role as victims in the first type of sacrifice (in which the sacrificer parts with something that is dear to him or that he owns) only if the wild animals have become, one way or another, dead or alive, the property of the sacrificer. In that case, the sacrificer would be parting with something that belongs to him, something that can for that reason be considered a substitute for himself. There are two ways in which one can become the owner of a wild animal. The animal is captured when young and is then domesticated it to the extent possible, before it is killed in a sacrifice. Or an animal is killed in the hunt, and

the hunter thus becomes the owner of its flesh, part of which can then be offered in sacrifice. The second possibility is less interesting for us at present, and less contested. Smith himself, as we have seen, admits that “the postmortem offering of some portion of an animal routinely killed for food . . . is certainly present among some hunters and gatherers.”²⁸

In order to find a place for wild animals in the second type of sacrifice, the wild animal has to somehow be regarded as or represent an enemy. The *Agniṣṭoma* sacrifice shows that this can happen on an abstract level, so that no real enemy is involved: King Soma is the enemy, but he is not a real enemy. A wild animal may similarly *be* or *represent* an enemy, without itself actually being a real enemy. As in the cases of King Soma or the warriors caught by the Aztecs, the wild animal as enemy must have first been caught and kept as prisoner before its sacrificial execution. This would fit the second sacrifice scenario. Modern human societies also know a variant of this: headhunting.²⁹ In the case of headhunting, the enemy or its representative is first killed and the sacrificial ritual is subsequently carried out on a significant part of the dead body (normally, the head). We could regard this as a variant of the second type of sacrifice. Similarly, a wild animal is killed during the hunt and an important part of it or an organ is subsequently used in sacrifice.³⁰ These latter two types (or a mixture thereof) is well attested among at least some present-day hunter/gatherer cultures. As stated above, these two options are less interesting for the present discussion because they cannot be considered to be the sacrificial killing of a wild animal.

The first type of wild animal sacrifice may exist, or may have existed until recently, among the Ainu of Hokkaido, Japan, in which a bear cub is captured, then raised in the village, and finally killed. Joseph Campbell describes this:

When a very young black bear cub has been brought alive into the village, he is adopted by one of the families and treated as one of the children, suckled by the mother, and affectionately pampered. When it becomes big enough to hurt the others when playing, however, it is put into a strong wooden cage, fed on fish and millet porridge, and kept for about two years, until time is thought to have arrived for it to be released from its body and returned to its parents in their mountain.³¹

It is possible to understand this passage as describing a rudimentary attempt to “domesticate” the bear, so that, in the end, it is a “domesticated” animal that is sacrificed. It is equally possible to interpret it in terms of the type of sacrifice in which an “enemy” is caught, kept, and

subsequently sacrificed. The situation is ambiguous, because the bear receives both affectionate and cruel treatment.

The bear, secured with ropes, then is taken from the cage and made to walk around in the circle of the people. Blunt little bamboo arrows, bearing a black and white geometrical design and a compact clump of shavings at the tip . . . are let fly at the animal and he is teased until he becomes furious.³²

The Ainu are not the only ones who practiced this kind of bear sacrifice. There are convincing traces to show that something quite similar took place in different regions in Europe in recent times. For example:

Là, c'est-à-dire en Béarn, en Navarre, en Catalogne, en Roussillon et dans une bonne partie du Languedoc méridional, l'ours est souvent la seule vedette du carnaval: une fête spécifique lui est consacrée, qui ne diffère d'un village à l'autre que par quelques variantes. Elle se déroule le plus souvent le jour de la Chandeleur (2 février) ou bien le dimanche suivant, quelquefois le jeudi gras. La trame en est à peu près toujours la même: un homme déguisé en ours descend de la montagne ou sort de la forêt; il enlève une jeune fille qui dansait avec des garçons—en général la plus jolie—et l'em-mène dans son repaire; on le poursuit, on le cherche, on l'appelle, on le trouve; il est alors capturé, ligoté, conduit au centre du village selon un parcours bien précis; mais le fauve s'échappe en chemin, terrorise la foule, simule un second enlèvement; pris de nouveau, il est cette fois enchaîné, humilié, rasé puis mis à mort.³³

Concernant les Balkans et les Carpates, les travaux des ethnologues ont surtout porté sur les rituels ursin du coeur de l'hiver et de la période du carnaval . . . un ours est mené en procession, décoré de pailles, de branches ou de feuilles; on lui offre des graines et des fruits, on le cajole, on le fait tourner et danser, on monte sur son dos. Le plus souvent, il ne s'agit pas d'un ours véritable mais d'un homme déguisé en ours, qui s'amuse à faire peur aux femmes et aux enfants. Parfois, notamment lorsqu'il s'agit d'un mannequin de paille, on en fait un souffre-douleur, on le met à mort symboliquement puis on le brûle.³⁴

It seems reasonable to assume that testimonies like these count as evidence that bear sacrifices did exist until quite recently. This would then count as proof that wild animals *can* occasionally be sacrificial victims, but there is no denying that these animals have in some sense been "domesticated." Indeed, our theoretical reflections oblige us to think that a live wild animal can only be sacrificed after some degree of domestication, even if that domestication consists only of keeping the wild animal for some period before it is sacrificed.

It is possible that there are other examples of wild animal sacrifice but if so, it would seem that they follow the same pattern. Mark E. Lewis, for example, writes that in early China warfare and hunting were identified with sacrifice, adding that prey was taken in the hunt to be used as sacrificial victims, and of

the old Zhou identification of hunting as a form of warfare and in the equation, as potential sacrifices, of prey taken in the hunt with prisoners captured in combat. . . . [T]he Zhou had emphasized hunts as . . . a practical means of securing sacrificial victims. . . .³⁵

This appears to confirm that wild animals, in order to become sacrificial victims, must first be caught and “domesticated” (in the sense of being held captive for some period of time).

Some scholars claim that the sacrifice with domesticated animals evolved out of prehistoric hunting and killing for food that was somehow thought of in religious terms. Walter Burkert is the most important representative of this position.³⁶ The problem with this position is that sacrifice (and ritual in general) tends to be “a stately and solemn ceremony,”³⁷ so that whatever the historical relation between hunt and animal sacrifice, the hunt itself cannot be looked upon as ritualized animal sacrifice.

Witzel nonetheless maintains that animals depicted in prehistoric paintings—he mentions large animals such as lion, wild bull, or antelope—were sacrificial animals.³⁸ If my reflections so far are correct, this would imply that such animals were caught alive by members of the tribes to which the prehistoric artists belonged. Is this conceivable? Did these remote ancestors have the means and materials to keep such wild animals captive? And if so, are there reasons to think that Stone Age hunters would have gone to so much trouble?

Witzel himself knows that there is no certain evidence to support all this:

We do not yet have actual proof of animal sacrifice during the Stone Age period—perhaps with the exception of the Lascaux and nearby scenes of the bison bull and the “shaman”—but the same attitude toward the offering and sacrifice of bears is seen in the Stone Age plastic art of France. In the case of Montespan, the body of a bear had roughly been fashioned out of clay. It was found draped with a bear’s pelt, with a bear’s head still attached, which another bear’s skull was found in front of this image. Some sort of bear cult is also seen in the Paleolithic enshrinements of bear skulls at Drachenloch in Switzerland, where the long bones of a bear were inserted into his mouth; and we can see its continuation in the [pre]modern circum-polar bear cult.³⁹

What is problematic in this passage is that “bear cult” and “bear sacrifice,” and perhaps more generally “animal cult” and “animal sacrifice,” are identified and therefore confused. Indeed, the following note accompanies the remark about Montespan:⁴⁰

This is controversially discussed by Bahn (1991), who does not reject Paleolithic hunting magic but denies that it had a dominant role and calls for much more caution in the interpretation of Paleolithic art. But note the recent find of a bear skull on an “altar” in the undisturbed Chauvet Cave, 32,000 BP.⁴¹

In this note what was meant to be evidence for animal sacrifice in Montespan becomes evidence for hunting magic. But these two, whatever their link, cannot be identified.

What does all this mean? Both the theoretical considerations and the evidence at hand seem to confirm that only “domesticated” animals can be sacrificial victims. Domestication must be understood here in a broad sense: beside ordinary domestic animals, captured wild animals can be included. Animal sacrifice should not be identified with animal cults or animal magic; even if the presence of an animal *cult* or animal *magic* in a certain population can be proven, this does not yet prove the presence of animal *sacrifice*.

What does this imply for pre-agricultural and pre-pastoral times? Self-sacrifice (whether in actual or mythological terms) is conceivable, and does indeed figure in Laurasian mythology, if Witzel’s reconstructions are accepted. The sacrifice of a substitute for oneself presupposes a (perhaps rudimentary) notion of ownership:⁴² the most obvious substitute for oneself in a largely possessionless society may well be a member of one’s family, e.g., one’s child. But it is difficult to imagine that such societies had the means or the infrastructure to catch and keep wild animals for any length of time. The same difficulty applies to the sacrifice of a wild animal that represents (or “is”) the enemy. Stone Age animal sacrifice seems therefore unlikely.

However, sacrificial offering of (at least part of) the flesh and meat obtained through hunting (the first type of wild animal sacrifice, or even the animal equivalent of headhunting, a variant of the second type) seems possible or even likely. This is not animal sacrifice of domesticated stock but sacrifice in which the newly acquired flesh of the killed animal is offered as a substitute for the sacrificer or for the enemy. This custom may be as old as the myths that mention self-sacrifice, or even older.

Notes

- ¹ Sylvain Lévi, *La doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brāhmaṇas* (1898) (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003, reprint), p. 132.
- ² Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur la nature et la fonction sociale du sacrifice," *Année sociologique* 2 (1899): 45; English translation in W. D. Halls, Henri Hubert, and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (London: Cohen & West, 1964), p. 32.
- ³ See, e.g., Madeleine Biarreau, "Le sacrifice dans l'hindouisme," in Madeleine Biarreau and Charles Malamoud, eds., *Le sacrifice dans l'Inde ancienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), p. 19; Ganesh U. Thite, *Sacrifice in the Brāhmaṇa-Texts* (Poona: University of Poona, 1975), pp. 143–144.
- ⁴ Willem Caland and Victor Henry, *L'agniṣṭoma. Description complète de la forme normale du sacrifice de soma dans le culte védique* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1906–1907).
- ⁵ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (Mādhyandina recension) (ŚPaBr) 3.9.4.17. See B. Schlerath, "The Slaying of the God Soma," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 68 (1987): 345–348; Georges-Jean Pinault, "About the Slaying of Soma: Uncovering the Rigvedic Witness," in L. Kulikov and M. Rusanov, eds., *Indologica. T. Ya. Elizarenkova Memorial Volume, Book 1* (Moscow: Russian State University for the Humanities, 2008), pp. 353–388.
- ⁶ For details, see Johannes Bronkhorst, "Rites Without Symbols," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 24 (2012): 236–266.
- ⁷ Alfred Hillebrandt, *Ritual-Litteratur. Vedische Opfer und Zauber* (Strassburg: K. J. Trübner, 1897), p. 153; Willibald Kirfel, "Der Aśvamedha und der Puruṣamedha," *Beiträge zur indischen Philologie und Altertumskunde. Walter Schubring zum 70. Geburtstag dargebracht* (Hamburg: Cram, DeGruyter, 1951), pp. 39–50; James L. Sauv  , "The Divine Victim: Aspects of Human Sacrifice in Viking Scandinavia and Vedic India," in Jaan Puhvel, ed., *Myth and Law among Indo-Europeans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 184 f.; Charles Malamoud, "Mod  le et r  plique: Remarques sur le paradigme du sacrifice humain dans l'Inde v  dique," *Archiv f  r Religionsgeschichte* 1/1 (1999): 27–40.
- ⁸ See, however, Hans Bakker, "Puruṣamedha, Manasarapuraṣa, Vāstupuruṣa: The Image of Man in the Sacrificial Context," *Journal of Indological Studies* 20–21 (2008–2009): 1–23. It is appropriate to note here what Bruce Lincoln wrote in "Debreasting, Disarming, Beheading: Some Sacrificial Practices of the Scyths and Amazons," in *Death, War and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 198:

I should note the possibility that some of these practices, like some of these peoples (particularly the Amazons), were more imaginary than actual, although . . . this in no way diminishes their interest or importance, for one can learn much from the imaginary practices of an imaginary people, particularly regarding the thoughts and values of those whose imaginations they inhabit.
- ⁹ H. W. Bodewitz, "Sins and Vices: Their Enumerations and Specifications in the Veda," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 50/4 (2007): 329–330.

- ¹⁰ See also Johannes Bronkhorst, "Sacrifice in the *Mahābhārata* and Beyond, Or: Did the Author(s) of the *Mahābhārata* Understand Vedic Sacrifice Better Than We Do?", forthcoming.
- ¹¹ Christopher Minkowski, "Snakes, Sattras, and the *Mahābhārata*," in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Essays on the Mahābhārata* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), p. 385.
- ¹² *Mahābhārata* (Mhbh) 5.57.10–18: *nāhaṃ bhavati na droṇe nāśvatthāmnī na saṃjaye/ na vikarṇe na kāmboje na kṛpe na ca bāhlike // 10 // satyavrate purumitre bhūriśravasi vā punaḥ/ anyeṣu vā tāvakeṣu bhāraṃ kṛtvā samāhvaye // 11 // ahaṃ ca tāta karṇas ca raṇayajñāṃ vitatya vai / yudhiṣṭhiraṃ paśuṃ kṛtvā dikṣitau bharatarṣabha // 12 // ratho vedī sruvaḥ khadgo gadā sruk kavacaṃ sadaḥ/ cāturho- traṃ ca dhuryā me sarā darbhā havir yaśaḥ // 13 // ātmayajñena nṛpate iṣṭvā vaivas- vataṃ raṇe / vijitya svayam eṣyāvo hatāmitrau śriyā vṛtau // 14 // ahaṃ ca tāta karṇas ca bhīrātā duḥśāsanaś ca me / ete vayaṃ haniṣyāmaḥ pāṇḍavān samare trayāḥ // 15 // ahaṃ hi pāṇḍavān hatvā praśāstā pṛthivīm imām / māṃ vā hatvā pāṇḍuputrā bhok- tāraḥ pṛthivīm imām // 16 // tyaktaṃ me jīvitāṃ rājan dhanāṃ rājyaṃ ca pārthiva/ na jātu pāṇḍavaīḥ sārḍhaṃ vāseyaṃ ahaṃ acyuta// 17 // yāvad dhi sūcyās tikṣṇāyā vidhyed agreṇa māriṣa/ tāvad apy aparitāyāṃ bhūmer naḥ pāṇḍavān prati// 18 //* J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *The Mahābhārata* (University of Chicago Press, 1978), vol. 2, p. 325.
- ¹³ van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 3 p. 447, has "their" instead of "this" here.
- ¹⁴ Mhbh 5.139.29–51: *dhārtaraṣṭrasya vārṣṇeya śastrayajño bhaviṣyati / asya yajñasya vettā tvam bhaviṣyasi janārdana / ādhvaryaṃ ca te kṛṣṇa kratāv asmin bhaviṣyati // 29 // hotā caivātra bibhatsuḥ saṃnaddhaḥ sa kapidhvajaḥ / gāṇḍīvaṃ sruk tathājyaṃ ca vīryaṃ puṃsāmī bhaviṣyati // 30 // aindraṃ pāśupataṃ brāhmaṃ sthūṇākarmaṃ ca mādhaḥ / mantrās tatra bhaviṣyanti prayuktāḥ savyasācinā // 31 // anuyātāś ca pitaram adhiko vā parākrame / grāvastotraṃ sa saubhadraḥ samyak tatra kariṣyati // 32 // udgātātra punar bhīmaḥ prastotā sumahābalaḥ / vinadan sa naravyāghro nāgānīkāntakṛd raṇe // 33 // sa caiva tatra dharmātmā śaśvad rājā yud- hiṣṭhiraḥ / japair homaiś ca saṃyukto brahmatvaṃ kārayiṣyati // 34 // śaṅkhaśabdāḥ samurajā bheryaś ca madhusūdana / utkṛṣṭasiṃhanādāś ca subrahmaṇyo bhaviṣyati // 35 // nakulaḥ sahadevaś ca mādrīputrau yaśasvinau / śāmitraṃ tau mahāvīryau samyak tatra kariṣyataḥ // 36 // kalmāśadaṇḍā govinda vimalā rathasaktayaḥ/ yūpāḥ samupakalpantām asmin yajñe janārdana // 37 // karṇinālikanārācā vatsadan- topabrṇiḥaṇāḥ/ tomarāḥ somakalaśāḥ pavitrāṇi dhanūṃṣi ca // 38 // asayo 'tra kapālāni puroḍāśāḥ śirāṃṣi ca/ haviś tu rudhiraṃ kṛṣṇa asmin yajñe bhaviṣyati // 39 // idhmāḥ paridhayaś caiva śaktyo 'tha vimalā gadāḥ / sadasyā droṇaśiṣyāś ca kṛ- pasya ca śaradvataḥ // 40 // iṣavo 'tra paristomā muktā gāṇḍīvodhanvanā / mahārathaprayuktāś ca droṇadrauṇipracoditāḥ // 41 // prātiprasthānikāṃ karma sātyakīḥ sa kariṣyati/ dikṣito dhārtaraṣṭro 'tra patnī cāsyā mahācamūḥ // 42 // ghaṭotkaco 'tra śāmitraṃ kariṣyati mahābalaḥ / atirātre mahābāho vitate yajñakar- maṇi // 43 // dakṣiṇā tv asya yajñasya dhr̥ṣṭadyumnaḥ pratāpavān / vaitāne karmaṇi tate jāto yaḥ kṛṣṇa pāvokāt // 44 // yad abruvam ahaṃ kṛṣṇa kaṭukāni sma pāṇḍavān / priyārthaṃ dhārtaraṣṭrasya tena tapye 'dya karmaṇā // 45 // yadā drakṣyasi māṃ kṛṣṇa nihataṃ savyasācinā / punaś citis tadā cāsyā yajñasyātha bhaviṣyati // 46 // duḥśāsanasya rudhiraṃ yadā pāsyati pāṇḍavaḥ / ānardaṃ nardataḥ samyak tadā sutyāṃ bhaviṣyati // 47 // yadā dronaṃ ca bhīṣmaṃ ca pāñcālyau pātayiṣyataḥ/ tadā*

yajñāvasānam tad bhaviṣyati janārdana // 48 // duryodhanam yadā hantā bhīmaseno mahābalaḥ / tadā samāpsyate yajño dhārtarāṣṭrasya mādḥava // 49 // snuṣās ca prasnuṣās caiva dhārtarāṣṭrasya saṃgatāḥ / hateśvarā hatasutā hatanāthās ca keśava // 50 // gāndhāryā saha rodantyaḥ śvagṛdhrakurarākule / sa yajñe 'sminn avabhṛtho bhaviṣyati janārdana // 52 //. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 3, pp. 446–447.

¹⁵ Mhbh 2.13.62–64: *tena ruddhā hi rājānaḥ sarve jivā girivraje / kandarāyāṃ girīndrasya siṃheneva mahādvipāḥ // 62 // so 'pi rājā jarāsamdho yiyakṣur vasudhādhipaiḥ / āradhya hi mahādevaṃ nirjitās tena pārthivāḥ // 63 // sa hi nirjitya nirjitya pārthivān prtanāgatān / puram ānīya baddhvā ca cakāra puruṣavrajam / 64 //.* van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 2, p. 60.

¹⁶ Mhbh 2.13.17: *prokṣitānām pramṛṣṭānām rājñām paśupater gr̥he / paśunām iva kā prītir jivite bhāratarābha // 17 //.* van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 2, p. 61.

¹⁷ Mhbh 2.20.10: *manuṣyānām samālabho na ca dṛṣṭaḥ kadācana / sa katham mānuṣair devaṃ yaṣṭum icchasi saṃkaram //.*

¹⁸ Bronkhorst, “Rites without Symbols.”

¹⁹ Hertha Krick, “Nārāyaṇabali und Opfertod,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 21 (1977): 101–102, paints the following picture of Vedic sacrifice:

Dem klassischen Ritual ist . . . der freiwillige Opfertod an sich fremd, da es ganz auf den Yajamāna als Sieger ausgerichtet ist. Dagegen ergibt sich aus der Sicht des Besiegten die Notwendigkeit, den eigenen Tod, die Niederlage als sinnvoll zu interpretieren und dazu bietet sich die alte Opfermythologie vom geopfertem Gott an: Der Tod wird nicht als Niederlage, als Verlust des Lebens, sondern als Opfer zum Gewinn neuen Lebens für sich selbst gesehen, als Überwindung des Todes, und so wird der Tod als Selbstopferung sogar primär als einzige Erlösungsmöglichkeit angestrebt. Es kommt auch im Ritual und in der Dharmaliteratur die Idee des Opfertodes wieder zum Vorschein, teils in der Sannyāsa-Struktur und im Krieger-Dharma, teils in der Rechtsprechung als Sühnetod und in der Höchstbewertung der Opferwilligkeit. . . , die bis zur Selbstaufopferung reicht und besonders stark im ātmaḍānam des Mahāyāna-Buddhismus sowie in der Praxis des religiösen Selbstmord überhaupt ausgeprägt ist.

I find this kind of reasoning unconvincing. As I wrote in “Buddhism and Sacrifice,” *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 66/1 (2012): 10, “[W]hy should [Buddhists] wish to mutilate themselves and give up their lives under [Vedic] influence, where even Vedic sacrificers did no such thing?” More than ideas and interpretations are needed to drive people to such extreme behavior.

²⁰ Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Domestication of Sacrifice,” in Robert G. Hamerton-Kelley, ed., *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 203–204.

²¹ J. H. M. Beattie, “On Understanding Sacrifice,” in M. F. C. Bourdillon and Meyer Fortes, eds., *Sacrifice* (London: Academic Press, 1980), p. 30; Marcel Hénaff, *Le prix de la vérité: Le don, l'argent, la philosophie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), p. 223.

²² Smith, “The Domestication of Sacrifice,” p. 202.

²³ Smith, “The Domestication of Sacrifice,” pp. 203–204.

²⁴ Michael Witzel, *The Origins of the World's Mythologies* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁵ In this connection see Witzel, *The Origins of the World's Mythologies*, p. 120:

While the Germanic and Vedic myths of Puruṣa and Ymir may thus go back to Indo-European mythology, the southern Chinese (Austric), Austronesian, Polynesian, and Hittite versions represent other traditions. However, in all these cases they were no longer told by ancient hunters and gatherers but by food-producing societies; in sum, they were reminiscences of an earlier stage of culture—and presumably, of mythology.

²⁶ Witzel, *The Origins of the World's Mythologies*, pp. 394–395.

²⁷ I discuss the reason why rituals are, and must be, holistic, i.e., following set patterns from which no deviations are allowed, in *Absorption: Human Nature and Buddhist Liberation* (Paris: UniversityMedia, 2012), p. 31 ff.

²⁸ Smith, “The Domestication of Sacrifice,” p. 204; see above. Cf. Ina Wunn, *Die Religionen in vorgeschichtlicher Zeit* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2005), pp. 158–159:

Auch die völkerkundlichen Parallelen, die bei Rust ebenso wie bei Maringer und Eliade die Hypothese eines frühen Primitivopfers zu stützen scheinen, erweisen sich bei näherer Betrachtung als nicht überzeugend. So pflegen traditionell lebende Wildbeuter wie die Pygmäen des Kongo oder die Buschmannvölker der Kalahari keineswegs einen grossen Anteil der Jagdbeute zu opfern, noch kennen sie eine kultische Verehrung von Gottheiten, die mit Opferhandlungen einherginge. Als einzige bedeutende Ritualhandlung ist das Primitivopfer im Zusammenhang mit Jagden üblich. Nach erfolgreichem Beutezug wird ein Stück von Herz und Lunge auf den Waldboden gelegt oder vernichtet, während der grösste Teil der Beute ins Lager geschafft und verzehrt wird. Auch solche Jägervölker, die elaborierte Jagdrituale kennen, pflegen keineswegs das erlegte Wild vollständig zu opfern. . . . Damit belegt ein korrekt angewendeter ethnographischer Vergleich, dass bei traditionell lebenden Wildbeutern das Primitivopfer durchaus zu den gebräuchlichen religiösen Handlungen gehört, ebenso wie Jagdrituale, in deren Verlauf mit dem erbeuteten Tier nach bestimmten religiös motivierten Vorschriften verfahren wird. In keinem Fall werden jedoch komplette Tiere geopfert. . . .

²⁹ See Bronkhorst, “Rites without Symbols,” pp. 244–245.

³⁰ This part could conceivably be the head of the hunted animal, in which case the term “headhunting” would be appropriate. According to one interpretation, this happened in the cave of Montespan, where a headless statue of a bear was found, along with a real bear skull: “La statue était sans doute recouverte d’une peau d’ours fraîchement dépecée et à laquelle adhéraient encore la tête; elle servait à des simulacres de capture et de mise à mort: dans l’argile se voit encore la trace des coups reçus par l’animal au cours de ces cérémonies”; Michel Pastoureux, *L’Ours: Histoire d’un roi déchu* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), p. 41, with reference to Michel-Allan Garcia and Philippe Morel, “Restes et reliefs: présence de l’homme et de l’ours des cavernes dans la grotte de Montespan-Ganties, Haute-Garonne,” *Anthropozoologica* 21 (1995): 73–77.

³¹ Joseph Campbell, *Historical Atlas of World Mythology. Volume I: The Way of the Animal Powers, Part 2: Mythologies of the Great Hunt* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), pp. 152–154. Cf. Mariko Namba Walter and Eva Jane Neumann

Fridman, eds., *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices, and Culture* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004).

³² Campbell, *Historical Atlas of World Mythology*, p. 154. See also Walter and Neumann-Fridman, *Shamanism*, p. 661.

³³ Pastoureau, *L'Ours: Histoire d'un roi déchu*, pp. 318–319.

³⁴ Pastoureau, *L'Ours: Histoire d'un roi déchu*, p. 318.

³⁵ Mark E. Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 18 f; 150.

³⁶ See, e.g., Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 54 ff. Witzel, *The Origins of the World's Mythologies*, p. 264, follows this position in part (emphasis added):

Typically, deities and rituals connected with food production are calqued on the earlier offering of the primordial giant *or a large hunted animal*, and they still stand out in the mythologies of societies that did not predominantly have agriculture but relied on pastoralism.

³⁷ See Johannes Bronkhorst, *Absorption: Human Nature and Buddhist Liberation*, p. 31 ff.

³⁸ Witzel, *The Origins of the World's Mythologies*, p. 396 ff.

³⁹ Witzel, *The Origins of the World's Mythologies*, pp. 398–399.

⁴⁰ Witzel, *The Origins of the World's Mythologies*, p. 570, n. 211.

⁴¹ Cf. Pastoureau, *L'Ours: Histoire d'un roi déchu*: “la grotte Chauvet, en Ardèche, . . . de toutes les images pariétales d'ours connues à ce jour, abrite à la fois les plus anciennes (vers – 32000 à – 30000) et les plus nombreuses (au moins douze exemples repérés). En raison des étranges crânes d'ours qui y ont été disposés—peut-être rituellement—, c'est également cette même grotte qui, plus que toute autre, invite à supposer l'existence d'un culte de l'ours” (p. 26). In spite of the fact that “[a]ujourd'hui, les adversaires du culte de l'ours semblent être majoritaires” (p. 34), Pastoureau himself seems inclined to consider the finds in this cave evidence for a bear cult: “[La grotte Chauvet] met [l'ours] en scène et semble en faire, plus que nulle part ailleurs, un animal digne de vénération: au centre d'une salle en rotonde, soigneusement débarrassée de tout mobilier et de tous les os et fragments d'os ayant traîné sur les sols, un grand crâne a été installé sur un bloc rocheux à surface plane, semblable à un autel; autour de lui, par terre, plusieurs dizaines d'autres crânes ont été disposés en cercle. Il y a manifestement là une mise en scène, qui est non pas le fait des ours ni la conséquence des accidents géologiques ou climatiques, mais bien due à la volonté des hommes. . . . Quelles que soient les découvertes à venir, la grotte Chauvet oblige à revoir bien des opinions. Ainsi le refus a priori de toute forme de pratiques culturelles liées à l'ours chez les hommes du Paléolithique, ou bien l'existence possible d'un culte de l'ours chez l'homme de Neanderthal mais disparu avec ce dernier” (pp. 38–39). Here, too, bear cult is not identical with bear sacrifice.

For images from Chauvet and other caves, see Jean Clottes, *L'art des cavernes préhistoriques* (Paris: Phaidon, 2008).

- ⁴² The notion of individual ownership is not unproblematic for the early period, during which societies may have been essentially egalitarian; see Christopher Boehm, *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

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