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c/o Teologiska Institutionen
Box 511, S-751 20 UPPSALA, Sverige
WWW: <http://www.exegetiskasallskapet.se/>

Utgivare:

Samuel Byrskog (samuel.byrskog@teol.lu.se)

Redaktionssekreterare:

Thomas Kazen –2013 (thomas.kazen@ths.se)

Tobias Hägerland 2014– (tobias.hagerland@teol.lu.se)

Recensionsansvarig:

Tobias Hägerland –2013 (tobias.hagerland@teol.lu.se)

Rosmari Lillas-Schuil 2014– (rosmari.lillas@gu.se)

Redaktionskommitté:

Samuel Byrskog (samuel.byrskog@teol.lu.se)

Göran Eidevall (goran.eidevall@teol.uu.se)

Blazenska Scheuer (blazenska.scheuer@teol.lu.se)

Cecilia Wassén (cecilia.wassen@teol.uu.se)

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Medarbetare i denna årgång/Contributors in this issue:

Göran Eidevall	goran.eidevall@teol.uu.se
Gunnel Ekroth	gunnel.ekroth@teol.uu.se
Stephen Finlan	sfinlan@bu.edu
Josef Forsling	josef.forsling@ths.se
Birger Gerhardsson	kob.gerhardsson@comhem.se
William K. Gilders	wgilder@emory.edu
Hallvard Hagelia	hagelia@ansgarskolen.no
Bengt Holmberg	bengt.holmberg@teol.lu.se
Thomas Kazen	thomas.kazen@ths.se
Miriam Kjellgren	miriamkjellgren@yahoo.com
Corinna Körting	corinna.koerting@uni-hamburg.de
Torsten Löfstedt	torsten.lofstedt@lnu.se
Kari Syreeni	kari.syreeni@abo.fi
Ola Wikander	ola.wikander@teol.lu.se

Response to Göran Eidevall¹

GUNNEL EKROTH (UPPSALA UNIVERSITY)

Sacrifices that are rejected is the topic of Göran Eidevall's most interesting contribution dealing with the so-called cult critical passages in the prophetic literature in the Bible. His interpretation of these texts not only throws new light on these particular passages within their own contexts and their implications for attitudes to sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible, but also relates them to the wider methodological concern of how scholarship approaches sacrifice as a ritual practice. This latter issue, the role of sacrifice within a religious system, is in fact far from unproblematic and I would say that there are few aspects of ancient religions that are more controversial and hard to grasp for modern scholars than animal sacrifice.

My comments and questions will deal with the biblical sacrificial rejections discussed by Eidevall as well as with rejected sacrifice within a wider Eastern Mediterranean context, in particular ancient Greece, but I also want to point to similarities and differences in Greek and Israelite ritual practices. This will be done from my own background, that of a classical archaeologist and ancient historian.

The phenomenon of rejected sacrifice

Göran Eidevall begins with an important initial observation, namely, if the prophets denounce sacrifice and launch this position as something new and totally different, this presupposes that sacrifice was a common cult practice in contemporary society. Furthermore, I find it convincing that the position of the prophets is not one of total renunciation of sacrifice as a valid ritual, but a situational and relational rejection. On certain occasions and for certain reasons Yahweh does not want any cult performed by a particular group. From this follows that the right offerings by the right worshippers are perfectly fine both with God and the prophets.

¹ This response is based on the version of the paper presented by Göran Eidevall at the Exegetical Day, organized by Svenska exegetiska sällskapet, September 24th 2013, at Uppsala.

Among the many interesting observations made by Eidevall, is the fact that Yahweh rejects the cult in its totality – burnt animal sacrifice, grain offerings, hymns and music. It is not animal sacrifice which is the problem for the Lord, the ritual hardest to grasp by modern scholars, but all expressions by the worshippers. This observation is made simply by reading the text at face value, paying attention to what is actually said and what is not. It is only a selective use of these passages, where certain elements are picked out and others left aside, which previously has led scholars astray to take the prophets to be renouncing sacrifice altogether. The inclusion of prayer in Isaiah 1:15 is particularly interesting. God here rejects sacrifice and prayer, but can prayer alone also be rejected? If prayer not accompanied by sacrifice is rejected, what then does the Lord find fault with: the worshipper or that which is being asked for?

The argument made here, entirely convincing in my opinion, is that Yahweh does not want these particular sacrifices, presumably since they are performed by the unjust or connected with strife and evil. If, on the other hand, we were to take the prophets' announcements as banning *all* sacrifices, we need to raise the question why Yahweh suddenly would not like to receive sacrifice. Why would he not want to be worshipped in this way? This would somehow negate his position as a god. Is there anything in the Hebrew Bible, apart from these passages, which seriously suggests that Yahweh was against sacrifice as such, of animals or of other matters? Why would people want to abolish sacrifice if there were no theological explanation behind it, if it is not sanctioned by God, so to speak? The notion that Yahweh was or would be against animal sacrifice is an interpretation that partly seems to be an anachronistic assumption based on our contemporary Christian position where sacrifice has no place within religion and we therefore tend to find it unsuitable as a cultic expression. It may also be influenced from the history of Judaism, where animal sacrifice first becomes concentrated to the temple at Jerusalem, only to cease completely after 70 CE. In this context it cannot be stressed enough, I find, that sacrifice in ancient cultures was a fundamental act, full of belief and meaning, and that much of the so-called "sacrificial critique" in the ancient sources brought forward by modern scholars actually concerns particular situations and contexts and not sacrifice at large.²

² Here I refer to the interesting and lucid work by Daniel Ullucci, who has revealed the methodological weaknesses of previous scholarship, see "Contesting the Meaning of Animal Sacrifice," in J. Wright Knust and Z. Várhelyi (eds.), *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice*

To return to Eidevall's text, I am a bit curious of the passage in Isaiah 1:11 and his interpretation as associated with a notion of Yahweh as eating meat and drinking blood. This may seem like a minor point, but I think it is useful to separate offerings transferred to the divine sphere by burning or discarding from offerings in the form of actual food, placed in front of the deity, to be eaten. In this particular case, it must be a reference to the burning of the meat on the altar, transforming it into fragrant smoke, and the discarding of the blood on or at the altar. The Greek of the Septuagint, which apparently differs from the Hebrew here, also suggests burning and a blood libation and not food offerings (τί μοι πλῆθος τῶν θουσιῶν ὑμῶν; λέγει κύριος· πλήρης εἰμι ὀλοκαυτωμάτων κριῶν καὶ στέαρ ἀρνῶν καὶ αἷμα ταύρων καὶ τράγων οὐ βούλομαι). Burning the meat and discarding the blood transfers them to the divine sphere so that they can be enjoyed or even "consumed" in a metaphorical sense by Yahweh. However, offerings of food that the deity actually is perceived as *eating* is a different matter. My problem lies in the use of the term "eating." What does "eating" imply and who eats? We should be aware that gods may in this sense be very different from human beings.³ At least Alfred Marx has made clear that even though a sacrifice to Yahweh can be perceived as a meal, it is never a question of feeding the Lord and satisfying his needs.⁴ Yahweh is here different from the Mesopotamian gods who were wined and dined every day, and for whom humankind had even been created so that they could prepare these meals.⁵ In connection to his presentation (on

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 57–74; and idem, *The Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³ In ancient Greek cult, there were different modes of transfer of the offerings, burning as well as deposition, bringing out different ways of communicating with the divine sphere, though none of them implied that the gods were eating what they were given, see G. Ekroth, "Meat for the Gods," in V. Pirenne-Delforge and F. Prescendi (eds.), «Nourrir les dieux?» *Sacrifice et représentation du divin: Actes de la VIe rencontre du Groupe de recherche européen «FIGURA: Représentation du divin dans les sociétés grecque et romaine» (Université de Liège, 23-24 octobre 2009)* (Kernos, supplément 26; Liège: Centre International d'Étude de la Religion Grecque Antique, 2011), 15–41.

⁴ A. Marx, "Tuer, donner, manger dans le culte sacrificiel de l'ancien Israël," in S. Georgoudi, R. Koch Piettre and F. Schmidt (eds.), *La cuisine et l'autel: Les sacrifices en questions dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études sciences religieuses, 124; Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 3–13.

⁵ On Mesopotamian gods as consumers of food, see A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 187–193; F. Joannès (ed.), *Dictionnaire de la civilisation mésopotamienne* (Paris: R. Laffont, 2001), 601–603, s.v. offrandes, and 717–718, s.v. repas; S. Maul, "Den Gott

the same occasion), William Gilders commented that there is not a big difference between “smokefying” and offering of meals. Still, the lumping together of these two kinds of concrete cultic actions can result in us losing the opportunity to grasp ritual variations which must have been essential in antiquity.

I also have a question about the last line quoted here: “Your hands are full of blood.” Apparently this is to be taken as a reference to the polluted state of the worshippers, which in its turn is the reason why Yahweh rejects their sacrifices. The worshippers have committed crimes and other forms of evil; therefore they are undesirable to the Lord. Is it beyond any doubt that this bloodying of the hands should only be taken as a reference to blood guilt and crime and not to the spilling of blood at an animal sacrifice?

Methodological approach

The methodological approach chosen by Eidevall concerns reciprocity, a key concept in understanding the interaction between gods and human beings in antiquity, but also between human beings themselves. The notion used is based on the work of the young American scholar Daniel Ulucci, who has written a highly interesting study, *The Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice*.⁶ But the concept of reciprocity as an interpretative framework for ancient polytheistic religion was actually introduced already in 1998 in a very important collection of papers, entitled *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*.⁷ This model, mainly derived from anthropology, captures and explains the fact that the parties in an immortal-mortal exchange

ernähren: Überlegungen zum regelmässigen Opfer in altorientalischen Tempel,” in E. Stavrianopoulou, A. Michaels and C. Ambos (eds.), *Transformations in Sacrificial Practices: From Antiquity to Modern Times: Proceedings of an International Colloquium, Heidelberg, 12-14 July 2006* (Performances: Intercultural Studies on Ritual, Play and Theatre, 15; Berlin: Lit, 2008), 75–86; J.-J. Glassner, “De l’invention du sacrifice à l’écriture du monde: Le repas des dieux en Mésopotamie,” in M. Cartry, J.-L. Durand and R. Koch-Pietre (eds.), *Architecturer l’invisible: Autels, ligatures, écritures* (Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études, Sciences religieuses, 138; Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 41–59.

⁶ See note 2.

⁷ Ch. Gill, N. Postlethwaite and R. Seaford (eds.), *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), in particular the contribution by R. Parker, “Pleasing Thighs: Reciprocity in Greek Religion,” 105–125. See also R. Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 7–10.

never are or can be on an equal footing and that the relation does not have to be symmetrical. This solves the problematic issue of the Greek gods not really needing the sacrifices and what is offered, as they have no bodily needs, a notion which has mostly bothered modern scholars, but also some ancient thinkers. The important thing is rather the gift-giving itself which establishes a long time relationship.

The application of the reciprocity model is highly suitable for the biblical passages studied here. Rejection of sacrifice and the negation of reciprocity which follows can actually be seen as a means for the gods to show that they are gods, that is, that they do not have to pay attention or respond to the advances of the worshippers. The rejection in a way marks their agency as divine beings. Being part of a gift-exchange network, as they are, they are also empowered to step outside it whenever they feel like it.

Reciprocity is a fundamental notion for the understanding of ancient Greek sacrifice and it may be useful to pause and consider the Greek evidence more in depth, especially since Eidevall draws a comparison and makes use of a model developed from the Greek context. What the Greek gods receive at sacrifice, which is the core of the undertaking, is honour, *timē*, no matter if the ritual is a burnt animal sacrifice, an offering of a cooked meal, or a libation. *Timē* is the absolute key concept of Greek religion, the essential element of Greek piety and the cornerstone of the reciprocity relationship.⁸ The appropriate *timē* marks who you are, your status and position within the hierarchy, but your position also makes you eligible for a certain kind of *timē*. This is clear from a number of Greek texts. For example, when Hesiod describes division of the world among the Olympian gods, he states that Zeus allotted each divinity their rightful honours, *timai*.⁹ The important part of a sacrifice, that is, what the gods really receive, is *timē*. This also helps explain why the Greek gods could be given both sacrifices consisting of burnt bones, underlining their immortality and difference from men, and invitations to be the guest of honour and be presented with a cooked meal, even though there is no tradition

⁸ For the importance of *timē* in Greek religion, see J. Rudhardt, "Du mythe, de la religion grecque et de la compréhension d'autrui," *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* 19 (1981): 227–244; J. D. Mikalson, *Honor Thy Gods: Popular Religion in Greek Tragedy* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 183–202; G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999²), 118 and n. 2, 149–152, 215–218; G. Ekroth, "Meat for the gods"; cf. Plato, *Euthyphro* 14d–15b.

⁹ Hesiod, *Theogony* 881–885.

of the Greek gods having to be fed or needing food.¹⁰ What they desire is rather the honour of being invited and treated as the foremost guest. It would be interesting to know if there is a term or a concept in Hebrew equivalent to the Greek *timē*, which encapsulates both the physical and metaphorical notion of what a god actually receives at a sacrifice, the ultimate content and purpose of the offerings, so to speak. In short, is there a Hebrew *timē*?

In the Greek world the concept of *timē* as a marker of who you are and where you belong within a larger context is applicable also to the human sphere. *Timē* is what makes Homeric heroes tick and it is lack of *timē* which makes Achilles withdraw from the battle at Troy. Linked to *timē* is the concept of *moira*, share, and depending on who you are, you are entitled to the right kind and amount of *moira*. This term is also used for the shares of meat distributed at animal sacrifice and also in this context does size and quality of your meat portion, your *moira*, express the degree of *timē* awarded to you.¹¹ So, the Greek *timē* can be used for the honour and status of gods as well as of men. This linking of gods and men is an important aspect to keep in mind if the reciprocity model of Parker, Seaford and Ullucci is to be applied to the Israelite evidence.

The application of a model derived from one particular culture and religious setting to another one raises methodological issues. The similarities between Greek and Israelite sacrificial ritual are striking, especially when compared to sacrificial rituals in the surrounding religious cultures, such as Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Egypt. Burnt animal sacrifice as the main cultic action, that is, the transferal of the offerings to the deity by the help of fire, is a particular characteristic for Greek and Israelite cult alone and it is also interesting that it is largely the same parts of the animal victim which are burnt in both cultures, back legs, tail sections and fat.¹² On

¹⁰ For this distinction, see Ekroth, "Meat for the gods," 35–36.

¹¹ On the role of the concept *moira* in Greek religion, see G. Ekroth, "Man, Meat and God: On the Division of the Animal Victim at Greek Sacrifices," in A. P. Matthaiou and I. Polinskaya (eds.), *Mikron hieromnēmōn: Meletes eis mnēmēn Michael H. Jameson* (Horoï. Hē mikrē bibliothēkē, 3); Athens: Hellēnikē Epigraphikē Hetaireia, 2008), 282–283.

¹² B. Bergquist, "Bronze Age Sacrificial *koine* in the Eastern Mediterranean? A Study of Animal Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East," in J. Quaegebeur (ed.), *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the International Conference Organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to the 20th of April 1991* (Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta, 55; Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 11–43; R. de Vaux, *Les sacrifices de l'Ancien Testament* (Les cahiers de la Revue biblique, 1; Paris: Gabalda, 1964), 46–47; D. Gill, "Thysia and selamim: Questions to R. Schmid's *Das Bundesopfer in Israel*," *Biblica*

the other hand, the differences between Greeks and Israelites should not be downplayed, especially when it comes to the perception of the divine, but also the use of the blood and the role of priests.

Still, if the reciprocity concept is to be taken as useful for both Greek deities and Yahweh and their interaction with their respective worshippers, does this in any sense suggest that Yahweh can be compared to a Greek anthropomorphic god or to be understood in the same sense? To put it differently, if we accept the reciprocity model as a valid one, which I definitely think we should do for the Greek context, what does that say about Yahweh? Did he have the the same kind of reciprocity with his worshippers as Greek gods had with theirs? Here we have to recall that the Greek perception of the gods was much more from a human, mortal point of view, than the Israelite one.

One further wonders if the rejection element in a way would have been perceived as harsher in Israelite cult than at a Greek sacrifice. At a Greek *thysia*, the most common kind of ritual usually involving an animal victim, an essential element was *hiera kala*, “the sacrifices are doing well,” that is, the god would make clear that the offerings were being accepted. The curving and rising of the sacrificial animal’s tail when put in the fire was the foremost sign of divine acceptance, the confirmation of the sacrifice being successful, but probably the smoke rising to the sky could also be used as a divinatory sign.¹³ Communication with the gods and divine confirmation was therefore an integral part of a Greek sacrifice. As far as I know, there is no similar element in Israelite sacrificial ritual. Here the aim was to please and honour the Lord, and there are no means for divining his will or assuring that the sacrifices were well received.

Along the same line it is interesting to note that a Greek worshipper could repeat a sacrifice after having been rejected and then succeed in the

47 (1966): 255–262; W. Burkert, “Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 7 (1966): 102, n. 34; M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 38–42; J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 3B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 2464; G. Ekroth, “Thighs or tails? The Osteological evidence as a source for Greek ritual norms,” in P. Brulé (ed.), *La norme en matière religieuse en Grèce ancienne: Actes du XIe colloque du CIERGA (Rennes, septembre 2007)* (Kernos supplement, 21; Liège: Centre international d’étude de la religion grecque antique, 2009), 146–148; S. Scullion, “Greek and Semitic: Holocausts and Hides in a Sacred Law of Aixone,” in Brulé, *La norme*, 153–169.

¹³ On divination at *thysia*, see Ekroth, “Thighs or tails?,” 148.

second, third or even fourth attempt. On the battlefield, when the army was facing the enemy, *sphagia* sacrifices were performed and the Greeks would not attack until the signs were favourable.¹⁴ Repetition continued until the gods had shown their benevolence even if this meant that the army had to suffer being attacked by the enemy; this was for example the case during the Persian wars.

The relation between Israelite and Greek sacrifice

The relation between Israelite and Greek sacrificial practices is a field that needs to be explored in more depth, especially considering the similarities in the execution of animal sacrifice, and Göran Eidevall's study constitutes a further step along this path.¹⁵

Eidevall draws on a study by Fred Naiden entitled "Rejected sacrifice in Greek and Hebrew religion" from 2006, where the author explores the similarities and differences in divine attitudes to rejected sacrifice in these two cultures.¹⁶ Naiden then relates this comparison to the main modern theoretical explanations of the structure and meaning of Greek sacrifice, an endeavour which is not entirely successful, I find. Even though the notion of rejected sacrifice is found both among the Israelites and the Greeks, there are further discrepancies within the practice which are important to take into consideration. Greek gods do not themselves tell the worshippers that they reject the sacrifice, which is contrary to the biblical passages where Yahweh himself speaks out. The reasons behind the rejection are also to be looked at. Greek gods seem less inclined to reject sacrifices due to faults in the ritual procedure or profanation of the holy space, which apparently is the case in some instances in the Hebrew Bible, although the overriding reason for rejection concerns the worshippers themselves. The exact procedure was not essential in Greek cult, apart from magical procedures, as compared to Israelite ritual. This may to some extent depend on the latter culture's tradition of sacrificial ritual being given or handed down from God and also to the fact that this was a culture for which a holy book was absolutely fundamental, in contrast to Greek

¹⁴ See M. H. Jameson, "Sacrifice before Battle," in V. D. Hanson (ed.), *Hoplites: The Classical Greek Battle Experience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 197–227.

¹⁵ For previous work, see above, n. 12.

¹⁶ F. Naiden, "Rejected Sacrifice in Greek and Hebrew religion", *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religion* 6 (2006): 189–223.

tradition which did not see ritual as conceived by the gods and which had no holy text.¹⁷

A final issue to comment upon is the necessity of having a pure mind when sacrificing. The importance of bodily purity is undisputed in ancient texts, no matter the culture. If one had killed a human being, had sex, or eaten certain kinds of food, one was polluted and therefore barred from the sanctuaries; this was the case in Greece.¹⁸ But the notion of a polluted or pure mind is something else. When does this come into play? From the Greek evidence, it is usually claimed that the purity of mind of the person sacrificing is a predominantly later development, presumably arising in the Hellenistic period and most of all found in contexts where the worshipper interacts more intimately with the god, as at incubation or oracle consultation. However, a closer look at the evidence gives at hand that this concept can at least be traced back to the Classical period.¹⁹ It would be interesting to see if this notion can be evidenced in the Israelite context at an earlier time.

To conclude, I want to quote Robert Parker, one of the most prominent scholars of Greek religion, who has pointed out that among the main worries of ancient Greeks was not the issue whether or not the gods actually existed, but whether you could get through to them and if they cared about the worshippers and their concerns.²⁰ Did the gods pay attention when people sacrificed? Apparently in most cases they did, but there was also the gnawing fear that the sacrifice might be rejected. One wonders if the fear of rejection would have been greater within a religious system where communication with the deity was linked to something concretely being offered.

¹⁷ Greek ritual behaviour at a specific cult-place was often regulated by so-called sacred laws, inscriptions laying out what the worshippers were to sacrifice, when and how, as well as the economics; see R. Parker, "What are Sacred Laws?" in E. M. Harris and L. Rubinstein (eds.), *The Law and the Courts in Ancient Greece* (London: Duckworth, 2004), 57–70. On the other hand, we do not really know if the gods would reject a sacrifice because it did not follow the stipulated regulations.

¹⁸ R. Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

¹⁹ See, for example, A. Chaniotis, "Reinheit des Körpers – Reinheit der Seele in den griechischen Kultgesetzen," in J. Assmann and Th. Sundermeier (eds.), *Schuld, Gewissen und Person* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1997), 142–179; A. Chaniotis, "Greek Ritual Purity: From Automatism to Moral Distinctions," in P. Rösch and U. Simon (eds.), *How Purity is Made* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2012), 123–139.

²⁰ Parker, "Pleasing thighs."