

On Typhon, Red Men and the Tomb of Osiris

Ancient Interpretations and Human Sacrifice in Egypt

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Introduction

The word sacrifice originates from the Latin word *sacrificum* (*sacer* “holy”, *facere* “to make”) and designates the act of killing an animal as an offering to a deity.¹ Accordingly, human sacrifice is often understood as the killing of a human as an offering to a deity. Therefore, the relatively recent assertion by K. Muhlestein, that “what one scholar may identify as *human sacrifice* another will label *capital punishment*”² indicates that Egyptologists should be more precise. There is a significant difference between the two practices.

The term “human sacrifice” is often in Egyptology quite erroneously used for entirely inappropriate contexts. Among these are the depictions of the strangling of Nubians in the tombs of Djehuty – TT 11³ and Montuherkepeshef – TT 20 from the reign of Hatshepsut/Thutmose III.⁴ Nothing in the textual and visual evidence indicates that these men were killed for the gods, although their killing was committed in a ritual setting.⁵ The so-called “execration pits” with human skeletal remains from Tell el-Dab’a

1 Carrasco 2013, 210.

2 Muhlestein 2011, 7.

3 The scene is not entirely published until now, but the strangling of the Nubians is described in other publications (Galán 2014, 253). I want to thank Jose Maria Galán and Andrés Diego Espinel for providing information on the scene, together with a photo I could consult in my work.

4 Yoyotte 1980–1981, 37; Muhlestein 2011, 34–35.

5 The motif of the strangling of Nubians is found within the context of the *tknw* ritual which revolves around the enigmatic *tknw* figure, depicted being dragged on a sledge and having various forms (shapeless spotted slag, shrouded pear-shaped object or shrouded human figure). There are around 48 thus far known representations of *tknw* ritual dating from the Old Kingdom to the Late Period, around 43 of which are from the New Kingdom (Theis 2011, 263–265; Katerina 2012, 20–35). TT 11 and TT 20 are the only examples where the *tknw* ritual is accompanied by representations of the strangling of Nubians. This has led some scholars to interpret all representations of *tknw*

are also not conclusive evidence of human sacrifice.⁶ Also, the supposedly secure case of killing in a ritual setting from the execration deposit of Middle Kingdom Mirgissa⁷ is not without problems.⁸ If weighed against all other evidence, the contexts mentioned above represent exceptions rather than rules. Additionally, as was stressed by J. N. Bremmer, “the ideal analysis should always pay attention to the question of who sacrifices what to whom, where, and when and with what kind of rhetoric.”⁹

Egyptologists have rarely dared to discuss this topic,¹⁰ which has received increased attention only recently.¹¹ Accounts of human sacrifice in ancient Egypt in the works of Greek and Roman authors, on the other hand, have played an essential role in formulating Egyptological interpretations. Thus, H. Junker surveying evidence on human sacrifice wrote: “If one compares it with how frequent representations of human sacrifice are in Philae, the report of Procopius wins by a large probability, and we have to accept that the gruesome rites were celebrated there into the latest periods.”¹² Such a straightforward interpretation of Egyptian temple representations has already been subject to criticism.¹³ Like Junker, J. G. Griffiths writes as a result of his own survey of the sources: “It must be concluded that human sacrifice was practiced in Egypt during the Roman period”¹⁴

Clearly, such statements are based on understanding ancient sources from the Greco-Roman world as valid and historically accurate reports on the actual and real state of affairs in Egypt. As a consequence, a circular argument is formed in which later sources, uncritically taken as valid, are used to interpret earlier sources, which are then in turn used to argue that there is a long continuous line of ritual practices of this nature.¹⁵ A good example is already to be found in the work of M. A. Murray:¹⁶

Human sacrifice, however, appears to have been practiced in Egypt at all periods. Harvest victims were burnt at Eleithyaspolis (El Kab), Amasis II of the XXVIth dynasty put an

ritual as being a human sacrifice (Muhlestein 2011, 36). However, if the ritual killing of humans was part of the *tkmw* ritual, one would expect to have it depicted more often (Griffiths 1958, 110–115; Volokhine 2013, 50).

6 Contra Fuscaldò 2010; Muhlestein 2011, 48. Arguments that the population buried in the cemetery were Nubians were also critically assessed (Matić 2014; 2018). The Mirgissa execration deposit is also not a context in which a human was sacrificed to the gods. Even if we accept that the person whose remains were found in association with the deposit was killed in this ritual, then we are dealing more with the use of a “living icon” of the bound enemy than an offering to the gods (Matić 2020).

7 Vila 1963; Ritner 1993, 153–163.

8 Matić 2019.

9 Bremmer 2007, 2.

10 Junker 1911; Griffiths 1948; Yoyotte 1980–1981.

11 Muhlestein 2011.

12 Junker 1910, 70, trans. Matić.

13 Burton 1972, 205.

14 Griffiths 1948, 422.

15 E. g. Yoyotte 1980–1981; Willems 1990, 49.

16 Murray 1913, 68.

end to human sacrifice at Heliopolis; Diodorus says that red-haired men were offered up at the sepulchre of Osiris; as the king was the incarnate Osiris, this would mean that human sacrifices were made at the royal graves, probably during the funeral ceremonies. The Book of the Dead also continually alludes to human sacrifice. At Edfu, an altar was found sculptured with representations of offerings in which human beings are the victims. Small figures, carved in the round, are known, which are in the form of bound captives; and show probably the method of binding the victim; the legs are bent at knees, and the feet bound to the thighs; the arms are bent at the elbows and securely lashed to the body.

In line with the general topic of this volume, I will attempt to untangle both the antique and Egyptological discourse on human sacrifice in ancient Egypt by providing answers to the following three questions:

1. Are there elements in the reports of Greek and Roman authors¹⁷ that can be found in the earlier ancient Egyptian sources?
2. Are there elements that could have been (mis)interpreted by Greek and Roman authors?
3. Are there elements that are not attested in ancient Egyptian sources?

To achieve this end, I will analyze the passages from Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch, Porphyry of Tyre, Achilles Tatius and Procopius of Caesarea and compare them to the contemporary and older Egyptian evidence.¹⁸

On Typhonians

Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliotheca Historica* (I.88.4–5), 60–30 BCE, reports that Egyptians sacrificed red oxen (πυρροὺς βοῦς συγχωρηθῆναι θύειν) because red was the color of Typhon who plotted against Osiris and upon whom Isis wreaked vengeance because of the murder of her husband. According to this report, men of the same color were of old also sacrificed (θύεσθαι) by the Egyptian kings near the tomb of Osiris. He adds that of the Egyptians few were red, but rather the majority of foreigners and that this explains the currency the story gained among the Greeks concerning the killing of for-

17 In this paper I will use the designation Greek and Roman authors to refer to those authors who were not native Egyptians and who wrote in Greek and Latin, although they could have originated from other parts of the Roman empire than Greece and Rome, like in the case of Porphyry of Tyre.

18 I will not deal extensively with the Busiris cycle and mentions of human sacrifice in the writings of ancient authors who do not provide sufficient background details. The primary aim of this paper is to investigate if there are elements in ancient accounts on human sacrifice in ancient Egypt which have parallels in Egyptian sources and could, therefore, illuminate the issue. The reader is advised to consult other works which analyze the sources on the Busiris myth in detail (e. g. Griffiths 1948, 409–416).

eigners by Busiris. Diodorus argues that this is in fact not the name of a king called Busiris,¹⁹ but confusion with the name of the tomb of Osiris where men of red color were sacrificed.²⁰ In another place (I.67.11) however, he explains the killing of strangers and the impiety of Busiris as a fictional tale invented because of the disregard Egyptians had for normal customs.²¹ The passage on the sacrifice of red men is usually attributed to Hecateus of Abdera;²² however there are numerous problems with this assumption, as aside from his accounts, Diodorus used multiple other sources.²³

There are several elements from this passage from Diodorus that can be recognized in ancient Egyptian ritual practices. At least since the Old Kingdom, as based on the Pyramid Texts (Spell 244, 249b), we know of the ritual of breaking of the red pots *sd dšr.wt* as a ritual for the destruction of malevolent forces.²⁴ The color red was in ancient Egyptian ritual practices associated with the god Seth.²⁵ Pyramid Text Spell 244 cited above also mentions the slaughter of a bull. Seth transforms into a bull in his attempt to rape Isis, as attested in Papyrus Jumilhac 3.1–3.5, dated into early Ptolemaic period.²⁶ Texts describing rituals are attested on the walls of Ptolemaic temples that date some centuries before Diodorus wrote his work. In the temples of Horus at Edfu and Hathor in Dendera, there are texts describing the slaughter and burning of Seth as embodied in a slaughtered bull (E. III, 178; E. VII, 148; D. X, 53).²⁷ The information Diodorus provides on the slaughter of red oxen could, therefore, have come from Egyptian priests, as he travelled through Egypt even down to Thebes, although his stay there was prob-

19 Namely, according to authors such as Pherecydes of Athens (Schol. Apollon. Rhod IV, 1396), Apuleius (De orthographia 2), Herodotus (II.45), Isocrates of Athens (Busiris, cap. 5 to 10), Eratosthenes of Cyrene (fragment in Strabo XVII.1), Diodorus Siculus (I.17), Virgil (Georgics III.5), Ovid (Ars Amatoria I.647–652), Statius (Thebaid XII.155), Plutarch (Parallela min, 38), Apollodorus (Bibliotheca II, v. 11), Hyginus the Mythographer (XXXI and LVI), Servius (Georgics III.5), Busiris was the king of Egypt who slew foreigners at the altar of Zeus and was defeated by Heracles (Griffiths 1948, 409–414).

20 Hopfner 1922, 129–130; Griffiths 1948, 417; Chamoux, Bertrac and Vernière 1993, 164.

21 Burton 1972, 204.

22 Greek historian and skeptic philosopher from the 4th century BCE, either from Teos or Abdera, who served in various capacities at the court of Ptolemy I Soter (323–283/2 BCE) and wrote *Aegyptiaca* in 305–302 BCE (Bar-Kochva 2010, 94–95; Muntz 2011, 575).

23 Chamoux, Bertrac and Vernière 1993, xxii–xxiii; Muntz 2011.

24 Sethe 1908, 137; Allen 2005, 29. Parallels are found in Pyramid Texts Spells 197 and 364 where it is clear that what is in Spell 244 attested as a personal pronoun is an enemy of Horus, identified by some authors as Seth, but the name of Seth is not attested in these spells. Cf. Schott 1928, 101; for the spells, see Sethe 1908, 113b, 614b, c, (d), 66, 329; Allen 2005, 80, 258.

25 Yoyotte 1980–1981, 45; Ritner 1993, 147–148.

26 Vandier 1961, 114. The dating is based on the paleography of the Demotic notes which provides a *terminus ante quem*. Several hands writing these were recognized, and they were written over a longer period. One also ought to stress that the papyrus uses a lot of earlier material, Quack 2008, 204–207.

27 For hieroglyphic transcriptions, transliterations and translations (Cauville 1997, 58; Chassinat 1928, 178; Chassinat 1932, 148; Kurth et al. 2004, 266).

ably short.²⁸ Therefore, we can safely claim that the sacrifice of red oxen is an element of the account of Diodorus, which has ancient Egyptian attestations as its background.

Another interesting element mentioned by Diodorus is the sacrifice of red men near the tomb of Osiris. A. Gardiner, A. Burton, J. Yoyotte and Y. Volokhine have already suggested a possible connection between this information and the Ramesside Dream Book from Papyrus Chester Beatty III (Recto II.1) which describes various characteristics of men associated with Seth, among which are redness of hair and eyes.²⁹ However, the very fragmented Ramesside text does not indicate that such men should be sacrificed. The Book of the Temple informs us that there were regulations of access to the temple based on certain bodily characteristics. Among those who could not access the temple were those of very red skin and every man with the appearance of Seth and Apophis.³⁰

The red men mentioned by Diodorus³¹ were reputedly sacrificed at the tomb of Osiris which was located at several places: Abaton near Philae, Abydos (Osireion of Seti I and the tomb of King Djer of the first dynasty) and Busiris.³² However, Diodorus clearly states that the tomb of Osiris was at Busiris and that this was the place where people were sacrificed. According to R. K. Ritner, Diodorus either misrepresented execration rituals as an actual human sacrifice or recorded real sacrifices, which were later replaced by execration rituals.³³ However, there is a significant difference between misinterpretation of execration ritual for human sacrifice and the idea that there was once human sacrifice, which was later replaced by execration. There is thus far no archaeological or written evidence for the sacrifice of humans to deities which dates before the first attested execration rituals of the Old Kingdom, so at present, we cannot argue that they replaced human sacrifice. There is, however, a well-documented practice of retainer sacrifice from early dynastic Egypt.³⁴ But these retainer sacrifices are not to be related to execration rituals. Nevertheless, Diodorus is quite explicit in referring to the killing of men. This element of his account could be associated with the narrative of Busiris and the killing of strangers, as in the account of the sacrifice of red men Diodorus mentions Busiris as the tomb of Osiris and the place where this was done.³⁵ But one also has to point to the fact that Busiris (modern Abu Sir Bana) has never been

28 Muntz 2011, 584.

29 Gardiner 1935, 10; Burton 1972, 204; Yoyotte 1980–1981, 55; Volokhine 2010, 232–233.

30 Quack 2004, 64.

31 He could have been thinking of the Philae abaton, considering that from the Ptolemaic period this was the most important abaton. It also corresponds in its landscape with later Roman Nilotic scenes in which the depiction of the tomb of Osiris is often found as a chapel among trees and vegetation (Versluys 2002, 272–273).

32 Griffiths 1982, 630.

33 Ritner 1993, 148.

34 See e. g. Morris 2014.

35 Burton 1972, 204.

systematically excavated. We might, therefore, be in for surprise, but in that case, we would deal with an exclusive find, as no similar evidence is thus far attested.

Plutarch in *De Iside et Osiride*, (*De Iside*, 73), 1st century CE, quotes Manetho and writes that in the city of Eileithya (Εἰλειθυίας πόλει) Egyptians burnt living men (ζώντας ἀνθρώπους κατεπίμπρασαν) calling them Typhonians. He adds that this was done openly on a special occasion during the dog days.³⁶ However, Plutarch relies on authors writing in Greek. He journeyed to Alexandria in his youth and his teacher in philosophy was named Ammonios and was possibly an Egyptian, judging by his name.³⁷ His reference to Manetho as his source is of particular importance for the credibility of the report, considering that Manetho was an Egyptian priest.

Eileithya is the *interpretatio graeca* for Nekhbet, the goddess of Upper Egypt³⁸ whose cult was based in Nekheb (today El Kab). Nonetheless, there are few secure attestations for burning as a punishment for criminals and rebels, and as treatment of enemies.³⁹ Griffiths⁴⁰ argued that at some point in time there probably were such practices at El Kab, but until now they are not attested there. Bearing in mind the absence of Typhon-Seth in the Hellenistic cult of Isis, Plutarch had to consult Egyptian sources.⁴¹ He states that his source was Manetho. Manetho also reports on the burning alive of

36 Hopfner 1923, 256; Griffiths 1948, 417.

37 Görgemanns 2017, 8.

38 Von Lieven 2016, 71.

39 Leahy 1984; Theis 2016, 250–251. The Book of the Temple also informs us that the punishment for those who trespassed into the Osirian part of the temple without authority would be execution and placement on the fire altar (Quack 2013, 119). As R. Müller-Wollermann excellently pointed out, the additional problem is that the ḥ brazier is too small for the burning of humans (Müller-Wollermann 2004, 197). The determinative for the word ḥ brazier is often in the form of a table with conventionalized slices of bread (R2 in Gardiner's sign list) and has parallels in depictions of such tables, e. g. tomb of Menkheperreseneb – TT86 (Erman und Grapow 1982, 223; Montet 1941, 20). Indeed, the representations of these braziers indicate that they are large enough that two geese can be placed on them, but certainly not a human. Another determinative (Erman and Grapow 1982, 223) is used for writing the word ḥ brazier (DZA 21.970.230, False door, Cairo 1385, 3rd dynasty) and it has the form of the bronze brazier of Ramesses II (JE 85910) found in the tomb (number III) of Psusennes I, third king of the 21st dynasty, in Tanis. It is 24 cm high, 36.5 cm long and 26.5 cm wide. Ramesses II dedicated this to the temple on the occasion of his jubilees. It is a chest-like box resting on four legs and having a flange at the top. Four holes split the lid and eight hollows arranged in three files. The shape of the brazier matches the shape of the determinative used for the brazier (Pino 2002). It is possible that such a brazier is depicted in the agriculture scene on the east wall of the chapel-broad hall in the tomb of Khaemhat (TT 57), an Egyptian official under Amenhotep III. The scene with this object shows a man under a tree next to an object of the same shape (d'Avennes 1878: Pl. III. 9). In the First Demotic tale of Setne Khaemwaset, the ḥ brazier is small enough to be placed above Setne (on the head) (Hoffmann und Quack 2018, 159). The word ḥ brazier is also attested in Coptic as a furnace or an oven used by a smith or for cooking (Crum 1962, 22). All of this confirms what Müller-Wollermann has pointed out, namely that the braziers we know of are too small for the burning of humans.

40 Griffiths 1948b, 418.

41 Görgemanns 2017, 13.

Bocchoris, Tefnakht's successor at Sais, by the Nubian king Shabako.⁴² It is important to stress the similarity of the accounts of Diodorus and Plutarch, at least where the element of the killing of Typhonian men is concerned.

The dog days when, according to Plutarch, Typhonian men were burned alive, were associated by the Greeks with the morning rise of Sirius and with the New Year.⁴³ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the dog days are mentioned in connection with the killing of Typhonians. Sirius (Egyptian *spd.t*) is, due to secondary phonetic developments, confused with Satet and also visualized as female and sometimes as the goddess Satet, later being associated with Isis.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Sirius is known in the Greco-Roman world as the dog-star, and from the contact of the Greco-Roman with the Egyptian culture, a stellar concept was developed in which Isis is connected to the dog and is herself depicted on the dog. For example, Isis is depicted on a dog and between two stars on gable of Iseum Campense in Rome.⁴⁵

On temple sacrifices and maidens

According to Porphyry's *De Abstinencia* (II.55), 234–305 CE, Amosis abrogated in Heliopolis the law of human sacrifice, as Manetho attests in his book *Concerning Antiquity and Piety*. Previously, humans were sacrificed to the goddess Hera and examined like pure calves three times a day, but Amosis ordered waxen equivalents to be offered instead.⁴⁶

The statement that Amosis, most probably Amasis (570–527 BCE), put an end to the practice of human sacrifice and ordered waxen equivalents to be offered instead of humans, could be an echo of Saite juridical reforms.⁴⁷ The motif of human sacrifice to Hera three times a day is of particular interest. Hera is the Egyptian goddess Mut in *interpretatio graeca*.⁴⁸ Where waxen equivalents are concerned, the use of wax

42 Leahy 1984, 201.

43 The Decree of Canopus by Ptolemy III Evergetus states that the inauguration of the New Year is the day of the rising of the star of Isis (Pfeiffer 2004, 63).

44 A Ptolemaic attestation of Satet-Isis is known from the Isis temple in Aswan (Valbelle 1981, 64). The dog is added to the iconography of Isis in the tombs from Akhmim and the earliest example of Isis seated side-saddle on a dog derives from Rome (Temple of Isis in the Campus Martius rebuilt by Caligula 37–41 CE) and the motif is later known in Egypt from coins of Vespasian from 71 CE in Alexandria (Venit 2016, 193). The dog is not associated with Isis in earlier Egyptian tradition.

45 Quack 2003, 58.

46 Hopfner 1922, 73; Griffiths 1948, 420.

47 They are possibly referred to in demotic papyri (P. Bibl. Univ. Giessen 101, 3.7; P. Carlsberg 301; P. Tebtynis in Istituto Papirologico G. Vitelli di Firenze) (Faulkner 1991, 122). According to Diodorus, the reforms of Amasis were primarily administrative, which, according to E. Seidl explains the difference between older and younger early Demotic law (Seidl 1956, 70).

48 Yoyotte 1980–1981, 59; von Lieven 2016, 62.

figurines in execration rituals in Egypt is well-known.⁴⁹ One should also consider the Ptolemaic temple depictions of bound prisoners in molds and fire basins as depictions of the destruction of waxen figurines.⁵⁰ Yet, this passage from Porphyry has caused a controversial Egyptological discussion, as some authors argue that a confirmation of such practices can be found in Late Period papyri (P. Vandier = P. Lille 139, Recto, 5, 7–12; P. British Museum 10252, 3, 21) which mention burning on the brazier of Mut (^ε*h n Mwt*) in Heliopolis.⁵¹

While these texts clearly refer to burning, one has to bear in mind the context of such attestations. In the case of Papyrus Vandier, we are dealing with a story in which the burning of the magicians on the brazier of Mut is the act of vengeance by the magician Merire whom other magicians had wronged.⁵² This is a literary and not a juridical account. It could be based on actual practice, but this has to remain speculation. In the case of P. British Museum 10252, 3, 21 the ones who are burned are actually the enemies of Re. The enemies of Re are mythical enemies who can be identical with the sinners and enemies of the dead in the texts describing the underworld.⁵³ What is even more interesting is that if one relies on both Plutarch and Porphyry, whom both claim Manetho as their source, living men called Typhonians were burned at El-Kab, whereas the practice of human sacrifice to Hera was ended during Amosis. This is in itself contradictory unless similar practices could have survived in different cities, or there was a big difference between burning Typhonians and sacrificing people to Hera/Mut.

Achilles Tatius in *The Adventures of Leucippe and Clitophon* (III.15), 300 CE, gives a very detailed description of an act of sacrifice in Egypt. The lovers Clitophon and Leucippe, after leaving Tyre in the Levant, end up in Egypt after a shipwreck, and while Clitophon is rescued, Leucippe is sentenced to be sacrificed by the bandits. The bandits were instructed to do this by an oracle with the intention of frightening their enemies. They had a clay altar to which two people led the captive Leucippe with her hands bound behind her. They poured a libation over her head and led her around the altar. The Egyptian priest chanted, with his facial expression signifying a song.⁵⁴ At a given signal, they all retired from the altar, and one of the young men tied

49 Papyrus Bremner-Rhind (Apophis Book) of Argeade date mentions placing of a wax figure of Apep on fire so that he may burn before Re and placing on the fire in the furnace of the copper-smith (Faulkner 1933, 46, 6–8; line 23/6–7).

50 Cauville 2012, 229. I thank Carina Kühne for giving me insight in her work on Late Period execration figurines and for her suggestions to consider these Ptolemaic temple representations as representations of execration rituals conducted on wax figurines.

51 Yoyotte 1980–1981, 81–82; Willems 1990, 49.

52 Hoffmann und Quack 2018, 171–172.

53 Zandee 1960, 223–224.

54 Griffiths suggested that this could indicate that we are dealing with an observation of a pictorial representation that is yet to be identified (cf. Griffiths 1948, 421). J. Yoyotte considers such a reading of the passage to be a misunderstanding, as in his opinion, when put into context, the sentence

Leucippe to four wooden pegs. He then took a sword, thrust it into her heart, and cut open her abdomen below. Then they removed her intestines and placed these on the altar. When they were roasted, they cut these into pieces and ate them. When they finished, the body of Leucippe was placed in a coffin.⁵⁵ Clitophon observed the sacrifice, but probably could not hear it, thus he assumed that the facial expression of the Egyptian priest indicated that he was singing. In fact, after witnessing the sacrifice of Leucippe, Clitophon goes to commit suicide on her grave, but he finds out that she is alive and that the sacrifice had been staged by the Egyptian Menelaus and a slave Satyrus. None of the elements of this account can be recognized in ancient Egypt and indeed the account has a happy ending, as the sacrifice was a staged act. It is nevertheless interesting that Menelaus and Satyrus staged the act according to an oracle given to the bandits.

Procopius of Caesarea in *De bell. Pers* (I.19.32–37), c. 551 CE, writes that the Blemmyes are accustomed to sacrificing even men to the sun and that these “barbarians” held temples at Philae up until his time, but that Justinian decided to destroy them.⁵⁶ According to the written sources, the Blemmyes had settled in the Dodekaschoinos around 394 CE.⁵⁷ Although not making the connection explicitly, Procopius of Caesarea mentions the sacrifice of men to the sun by the Blemmyes and their holding of the temples at Philae in the same passage. Bearing in mind the role of the first cataract as the meeting point of the Christian and pagan world in the 6th century CE such an idea would fit well in the image of the ordered Christian world and the terrible practices beyond its borders.⁵⁸ One should, however, not exclude that this was at the same time a misinterpretation of retainer sacrifices that are well attested in Nubia from this period.

explains the position of the narrator as separated by a canal from the place of sacrifice (Yoyotte 1980–1981, 33).

55 Hopfner 1923, 460; Griffiths 1948, 420–421.

56 Hopfner 1924, 707–708; Griffiths 1948, 421.

57 Dijkstra 2012, 241. One should also consider that ancient authors also use the ethnonym Blemmyes for the local populations of Dodekaschoinos, which included other ethnic groups (Obluski 2013, 146).

58 The Roman government abandoned the areas south of Aswan in Egypt during the reign of Diocletian and the priests who resided in Nubia were then employed by the Nubian rulers (Meroites, followed by Blemmyes and Nobadae) who continued to support the traditional cults. North of Aswan most, if not all, of the temples were closed through lack of support considering the increasing spread of Christianity. Narses, under orders from Justinian, closed the Temple on Philae in the 6th century, because there was no longer a significant political entity south of Aswan which could continue support of this temple (Cruz-Uribe 2010, 506).

Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the ancient sources on human sacrifice in ancient Egypt as written by Greek and Roman authors:

1. Some motifs attested in Greek and Roman authors are known from Egypt.
 - a) Red oxen slaughter, as mentioned by Diodorus, is attested in ancient Egypt in connection with the destruction of an enemy of the king and gods since the Pyramid Texts and had a prominent role in the rituals of destruction of Seth in Ptolemaic temples.
 - b) Red as the color of Typhon/Seth, as mentioned by Diodorus, is attested in ancient Egypt in connection with the destruction of an enemy of the king and gods in the form of breaking of the red pots since the Pyramid Texts.
 - c) Waxen figurines used instead of humans, as mentioned by Porphyry, are indeed attested in ancient Egyptian execration rituals.
2. Some sacrificial motifs are probably (mis)interpreted from temple iconography and other texts.
 - a) The burning of men, as mentioned by Plutarch, could be a (mis)interpretation of temple representations of incineration of bound prisoners or red-colored wax figurines. Considering that Plutarch's source for his statement is Manetho, it is also tempting, but in no case definite, to relate this to Manetho's account of Shabako burning alive Bocchoris. The problem is of course that the report from Plutarch has a parallel in the account of Diodorus where the killing of Typhonians is concerned.
 - b) Amosis substituting human sacrifice for wax figurines, as mentioned by Porphyry, could be a (mis)interpretation of the Saite reforms in fusion with the interpretation of the use of wax figurines in execration rituals.

It seems that elements that indeed have parallels in ancient Egyptian ritual practices are found only in Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch and Porphyry of Tyre. It is interesting to note that the Book of the Temple which comprises more than fifty identified manuscripts in a very fragmentary state, with most of the extant manuscripts dating to the 1st and 2nd century CE,⁵⁹ does not mention the ritual killing of humans. The idea that human sacrifice in ancient Egypt was not common during the pharaonic period, but became so in certain areas and cults later⁶⁰ is therefore not corroborated by Egyptian sources and is instead based on the accounts of Greek and Roman writers.

Human sacrifice was widely understood among the Greeks as a marker of barbarity by the latter part of the 5th century BCE.⁶¹ In Latin literature, human sacrifice as a motif

59 Quack 2016, 267–268. Also mentioned in personal communication.

60 Griffiths 1948, 423.

61 Rives 1995, 68–69.

appears in descriptions of foreign peoples to stress their un-Romanness.⁶² Greek and Roman authors presented the motif of “human sacrifice” as a custom assigned to the oriental *other* to their Greek and Roman audience. Already A. Burton⁶³ argued that the statements of Classical authors cannot be considered as *prima facie* cases for human sacrifice.

We nevertheless have to take into account the possibility that at least some of the accounts of Greek and Roman authors could be vindicated by Egyptian evidence in the future. This is especially so because of the similar accounts of Diodorus and Plutarch, the possible Egyptian source in the case of Diodorus and the quoting of Manetho, an Egyptian priest, by Plutarch. However, at the moment the Egyptian evidence we have does not indisputably confirm any of these accounts.

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