

## THE ENCAENIA OF ST SOPHIA: ANIMAL SACRIFICE IN A CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

One of the questions that has preoccupied scholars engaged with the account of the building of the Great Church of St Sophia in Constantinople,<sup>1</sup> a mid-Byzantine legend dated traditionally to the eighth or ninth century, is whether any historical value could be accorded to various elements of the narrative — the story proved to abound in factual mistakes and anachronisms.<sup>2</sup> Even more so, the passage describing the dedication of the newly built church of St Sophia, and especially the animal sacrifices offered by the emperor Justinian as a part of the ceremony, has been usually considered fictitious and legendary.

Upon finishing the church and the sacred ornaments on the twenty-second of December, he [Justinian] went out from the Palace with a procession to the gates of the Augusteion leading to the Horologion, mounted on a four-horsed chariot. He sacrificed a thousand bulls, six thousand sheep, six hundred deers, a thousand swine, birds and cocks ten thousand each, and gave it out to the poor and needy. He also dispensed thirty thousand measures of grain. He was distributing

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(1) The *Diegesis* is used henceforward as a shortened form for the account of the building of St Sophia in Constantinople: Διήγησις περὶ τῆς οἰκοδομῆς τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Μεγάλης Ἐκκλησίας, τῆς ἐπονομαζομένης Ἀγίας Σοφίας, edited by Th. PREGER, *Scriptores originum constantinopolitanarum* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1901–1907), vol. 1, 74–108; vol. 2, 284–289. The critical edition, which is used in the present work, is made by E. VITTI, *Die Erzählung über den Bau der Hagia Sophia in Konstantinopel. Kritische Edition mehrerer Versionen* (Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1986).

(2) C. MANGO, Byzantine Writers on the Fabric of Hagia Sophia, in: R. MARK and A. Ş. ÇAKMAK (eds.), *Hagia Sophia from the Age of Justinian to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 41–56; G. DAGRON, *Constantinople Imaginaire: Études sur le recueil des “Patria”* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984); A. BERGER, Santa Sophia fra storia e leggenda, in: *Santa Sofia ad Istanbul. Sei secoli di immagini e il lavoro di restauro di Gaspare Fossati 1847–49* (Mantova: Casa del Mantegna, 1999) 29–38; J. M. EGEA, *Relato de cómo se construyó Santa Sofia según la descripción de varios codices y autores* (Granada: Centro de Estudios Bizantinos, Neogriegos y Chipriotas, 2003) 14–19.

all this until three o'clock of the same day. Then the emperor Justinian entered with a cross and accompanied by the patriarch Eutychius, and breaking free from the hands of the patriarch from the imperial gates he ran alone to the ambo; he stretched out his hands and said: "Glory be to God who made me worthy to accomplish such a work; I have vanquished you, Solomon!" After the entrance he gave largesse and distributed three *kentinaria* to the people having Strategius the *magister* pour it onto the ground. On the following day he celebrated the opening of the church, offering the same and even more abundant whole-burnt sacrifices, and up to the holy Epiphany, during fifteen days, he was giving feasts to all, distributing alms, and bringing thanksgivings to the Lord. In this way he finished the work of his desire.<sup>3</sup>

Dagron explained this curious account of animal sacrifices, asserting that the author intended to model his story on the Old Testament narrative of Solomon's Temple. It is impossible to deny the close resemblance of the passage with the Biblical account of the dedication of the Temple. The description of the dedication of St Sophia could have been inspired, as Dagron is inclined to believe, through the intermediary of Josephus Flavius's *Jewish Antiquities* rather than by the Old Testament directly.<sup>4</sup> The recurrence of the same words in both texts, if not whole phrases, justifies such a close association of the two accounts. However, when questioning the credibility of the animal sacrifice that accompanied the dedication ceremony in the *Diegesis*, Dagron deemed it as shocking and provoking nothing but laughter to a Byzantine reader, who was certainly aware that the sacrifice offered to God was the bloodless sacrifice, that is the Eucharist.<sup>5</sup> He considered this part of the description in the *Diegesis* as contradictory to the evidence derived from an anonymous sixth-century *kontakion* for the *encaenia* of St Sophia which plainly speaks of spiritual sacrifice rather than the sacrifice of animals: "Here sacrifices of the mind in spirit and in truth, not in reeking smoke and streams of blood, are offered untiringly as an odour of sweetness onto God."<sup>6</sup>

(3) VITTI, *Die Erzählung...*, 463–464.

(4) DAGRON, *Constantinople Imaginaire...*, 297–298.

(5) "Les sacrifices sanglants dont est accompagnée la fête de la dédicace ne pouvaient que choquer ou faire rire un lecteur byzantin auquel on ressaisait que l'eucharistie était un « sacrifice non sanglant »..." DAGRON, *Constantinople Imaginaire...*, 306.

(6) "Νοητῶς αἱ θυσίαι ἐνταῦθα ἐν τῷ πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ, οὐκ ἐν κνίσσαις καπνῶν καὶ αἱμάτων ῥοαῖς ἀνευδότης θεῷ εἰς ὁσμὴν εὐωδίας

In a recent article, Lourié offers a new perspective on animal sacrifice at the celebration of the dedication of St Sophia as described in the *Diegesis*.<sup>7</sup> In view of all the scattered data pertaining to the history of animal sacrifices in the Christian context, which has been largely ignored by modern scholars but recapitulated in his study, Lourié argues that the account of the dedication of St Sophia has a high degree of plausibility. The assumption that the second ceremony of the dedication was indeed conducted with the “bloodless sacrifices” — according to the *dedication hymn* that was composed for the ceremony of 562 — does not prevent Lourié from believing that animal sacrifice could have been made during the first dedication. He comments that thus far we do not have at our disposal sufficient material to allow reconstruction of the real liturgical order of the church dedication in the sixth century, let alone its perception in the middle Byzantine period.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, it would be extremely intriguing to provide a possible solution to the puzzle — a task which is actually undertaken here — of why the Byzantine author would introduce into his account, of such a significant Constantinopolitan church, material which, if Dagron is correct, could be immediately censored and discarded as outrageous and fictitious. It is quite remarkable that the account of the dedication followed by the bloody sacrifices was accepted by the religious public and church authorities and, while it became popular and remained the sole narrative of the dedication of the church, circulated without any attempt at expurgation.<sup>9</sup> The passage could certainly appear shocking, as Dagron

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προσάγονται” С. А. ТРЪПАНИС, *Fourteen Early Byzantine Cantica* (Vienna: E. Betsvar, 1968) 146. Translation by A. PALMER, *The Inauguration Anthem of Hagia Sophia in Edessa: a New Edition and Translation with Historical and Architectural Notes and a Comparison with a Contemporary Constantinopolitan Kontakion* (With an appendix by L. RODLEY) *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988) 143. Cf. John 4:24.

(7) В. М. ЛУРЬЕ, Из Иерусалима в Аксум через храм Соломона: архаичные предания о Сионе и Ковчеге Завета в составе Кебра Негест и их трансляция через Константинополь *Христианский Восток* n.s. 2 (2000) 156–161, 202–206.

(8) ЛУРЬЕ, Из Иерусалима в Аксум..., 157.

(9) The sheer number of surviving manuscripts is usually considered sufficient proof of the popularity of the *Diegesis* — there are more than 80 codices transmitting the narrative in Greek. More than that, the narrative was translated into Latin, different dialects of Slavonic, Medieval Georgian, which made it known in other parts of Christendom too. Lourié points out that the attitude towards the *Diegesis* was apparently quite serious and there was no

believes it indeed was, in view of the explicitly condemning stance of the Byzantine Church on the issue of animal sacrifices.<sup>10</sup> This study will investigate whether the offering of animal sacrifice could really have been an element of a factual way of celebration of the *encaenia* in the early stages of the Christian liturgy. If not, then there must have existed a powerful incentive for this description to have been included in the *Diegesis*, a description which is not only fictitious but indeed fantastic, in a Christian perspective. Thus the question arises, which will be dealt with in the course of the present study, of whether the biblical narrative of the dedication of the Temple was the only and sufficient paradigm for such a depiction or were there other agencies and models that motivated and at the same time justified the introduction of the description of animal sacrifices into the account of the *encaenia* of St Sophia.

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alternative account of the building and dedication of St Sophia ever created (Лурье, Из Иерусалима в Аксум..., 156, n. 46). The oldest of the Georgian manuscripts containing the *Diegesis*, namely the thirteenth-century Ms. A-70, suggests that the narrative was the official text for the celebration of the church dedication (О. БЕРИДЗЕ, *Византийский трактат о построении храма Св. Софии и его средневековый грузинский перевод* (Тбилиси, 1982) 9–12). The Georgian translation of the *Diegesis* was set around May 11 (the manuscript does not give the exact date for the feast which, however, can be established fairly precisely through the surrounding entries) and commemorated, probably, one of the biggest restorations of St Sophia's celebration which was timed to coincide with the *encaenia* of Constantinople (А. И. ПАПАДОПУЛО-КЕРАМЕВС, Из истории греческих этимологиков, *Журнал Министерства Народного Просвещения* 319 (1898) 115–119. Cf. *Theoph. Cont.* V.79 The Constantinopolitan tradition of the *encaenia* on May 11 (or the nearest adjacent Sunday) was kept also in Kievan Rus: О. В. ЛОСЕВА, *Русские месяцесловы XI–XIV веков* (Москва: Памятники исторической мысли, 2001) 88. Although there is no surviving equivalent evidence about the liturgical usage of the *Diegesis* in Byzantium, the Georgian hagiographical collection reflects, almost without doubt, the Byzantine liturgical tradition. It is very likely that the composition of the Byzantine *Diegesis* was intended for a particular function — it was meant to serve as the commemoration account for the annual *encaenia* of St Sophia in Constantinople.

(10) See, for example a homily by Theodoret of Cyrrihus, Graecarum affectionum curatio VII: De sacrificiis, PG 83, 991–1006. P. CANIVET (ed. and French trans.), Theodoret of Cyrrihus, *Thérapeutique des maladies helléniques*, vol. 2 (Paris: Cerf, 1958) (SC 57) 296–309; also, treatment of sacrifice by Eusebius of Caesarea in the sections IV.9–20 of his *Praeparatio Evangelica*. E. DES PLACES (ed.), O. ZINK (French trans.), Eusebius of Caesarea, *La préparation évangélique. Livres IV–V, 1–17* (Paris: Cerf, 1979) (SC 262) 126–209.

The following exposition, therefore, will offer a review of the problem of animal sacrifices within the system of the Early Christian liturgical practices. The pieces of surviving evidence strongly suggest that animal sacrifice was not a phenomenon entirely foreign to the Early Christian liturgy. Contrary to the prevailing opinion that denies the existence of any form of animal sacrifice as a part of Christian worship, the survival of ritual immolation of animals in the Christian milieu is convincingly corroborated by a number of texts. The enactment of animal sacrifice is reflected in the literature of the Early Christian and Medieval period, which presents nowadays a unique source for reconstruction of the old customs.

Only after such an examination can a relevant analysis of the description of animal sacrifices that allegedly accompanied the dedication ceremony of St Sophia be undertaken. The acknowledgement of the historical place of animal sacrifice in the Christian culture can open a new perspective onto the animal sacrifices of Justinian at the dedication of St Sophia, so minutely described in our legendary *Diegesis*. The following analytical review of available material, therefore, seeks to demonstrate that, besides unequivocally evidencing the existing practice, the scattered records pertaining to animal sacrifices in the Christian setting expose a number of parallels with the description in the *Diegesis*. After an overview of the source material demonstrating the practice of animal sacrifice in the Medieval Latin, Armenian, and Byzantine traditions — tentatively grouped for the sake of clarity — the passage of the *Diegesis*, narrating of Justinian's immolation of animals at the dedication of St Sophia, will be re-examined in light of the surviving records. The interpretation of the curious section of the *Diegesis*, offered at the end of this article, will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of its seemingly bizarre content.

### *The problem of animal sacrifice in a Christian context*

Needless to say, an odd juxtaposition of the words "Christian" and "animal sacrifice" evokes immediately a certain degree of perplexity. Indeed, this formulation sounds more as a contradiction or a paradox rather than a realistic phenomenon. As it is widely known, the Christian religion does not practice or even justify any sacrificial offering of animals. In the very core of Christianity lies the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that is regarded as the only adequate and sufficient act for the expiation of sins and redemption of all humankind. As the tenth chapter of the letter to Hebrews expounds, the sacrificial death of Christ once

and for all abolished any other type of animal sacrifice.<sup>11</sup> The animal offerings of the Old Testament that preceded the sacrifice of Christ are declared no longer relevant and overall redundant. The only form of sacrifice — the “bloodless” sacrifice known as the Eucharist — has been firmly introduced into the Christian liturgy entirely replacing the Old Testament sacrificial system.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, there is no place left for the ritual of animal sacrifice in the system of Christian beliefs. What is more, the practice of animal sacrifice has been deemed as abominable; it has often been condemned as idolatrous and even demonic from the early centuries of Christianity onward.<sup>13</sup> The formal stance of Church theologians, therefore, has been always explicitly intolerant of any form of animal sacrifice — even a gift-offering version of *kourbania* — which was recurrently labeled as a barbarian practice and a trace of a pagan error.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the very possibility of the existence of animal sacrifice in the Christian liturgy has been generally rejected as unreasonable and hostile to Christian theology and the official policy of the Byzantine Church.

No wonder then, that the ritual of animal sacrifices in the context of Christian culture has been a rather controversial issue. Yet recently the

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(11) Cf. J. DUNNILL, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). A. N. CHESTER, Hebrews: The Final Sacrifice, in: S. W. SYKES (ed.), *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 57–72.

(12) E. R. FALARDEAU, *A Holy and Living Sacrifice: the Eucharist in Christian Perspective* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996); C. BUCHANAN, *Essays on Eucharistic Sacrifice in the Early Church* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1984); F. YOUNG, *The Use of Sacrificial Ideas in Greek Christian Writers from the New Testament to John Chrysostom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); G. AULÉN, *Eucharist and Sacrifice* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958); R. J. DALY, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

(13) The most extensive theological treatment of sacrifices, both animal and human, is given by Eusebius in his *Preparatio Evangelica*, IV.9–20. A later example of condemnation of any sort of sacrifice is found in Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain in his commentary on the canon 99 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, see n. below.

(14) S. GEORGUDI, *L'égorgement sanctifié en Grèce moderne: les « Kourbania » des saints*, in: M. DETIENNE, J.-P. VERNANT (éds.), *La cousine du sacrifice en pays grec* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979) 291, n. 3; Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, *Πηδάλιον τῆς νοητῆς νηὸς τῆς Μιᾶς Ἀγίας Καθολικῆς καὶ Ἀποστολικῆς τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων Ἐκκλησίας* ([Reprint] Thessalonica: Publishing House of V. Regopoulos, 1998) 309–310, especially n. 2.

research of some scholars has led to recognition of the fact that indeed there were rituals in Early Christianity that involved the practice of slaying animals.<sup>15</sup> The phenomenon of sacrifices as a part of Christian worship, however, has received very little attention as compared to its pagan Hellenic counterpart.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, even monographs devoted specifically to the theme of Christian sacrifice do not consider the phenomenon of Christianised animal sacrifice at all.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, as the reviewed evidence will disclose, there are sufficient grounds to maintain that animal sacrifices were indisputably practiced in a Christian context in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

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(15) D. J. PALLAS, *La 'Thalassa' dans l'Église Chrétienne* (Athens: L'Institut Français d'Athènes, 1952); C. GROTANELLI, *Appunti sulla fine dei sacrifici, Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 12 (1989) 175–192; J. TIXERONT, *Le rite du matal, Bulletin d'ancienne littérature et d'archéologie chrétiennes* 3 (1913) 81–94; ЛУПЬЕ, Из Иерусалима в Аксум..., 202–206. It should be acknowledged that a substantial amount of material dealing with the question of animal sacrifices in the Christian culture was brought to light by scholars interested particularly in the Armenian ritual of *matał*. A significant part of the research on Armenian sacrifices was carried out by F. Conybeare who published some textual sources relating to this phenomenon and whose scholarship has often been indispensable for anybody approaching the issue of animal sacrifices in the Christian world. Of special interest is his collection of texts: F. CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum being the Administration of the Sacraments and the Breviary of the Armenian Church together with the Greek Rites of Baptism and Epiphany* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905). Equally important are his pioneering articles: F. CONYBEARE, *Les sacrifices d'animaux dans les anciennes églises chrétiennes, Revue de l'histoire des religions* 44/1 (1901) 108–114, and IDEM, *The Survival of Animal Sacrifices inside the Christian Church, American Journal of Theology* 7/1 (1903) 62–90.

(16) There are numerous publications on the topic of animal sacrifices in Antiquity. See, for instance, R. K. YERKES, *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1953); W. BURKERT, *Homo Necans — Interpretationen altgriechischer Opferriten und Mythen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972); M. DETIENNE and J.-P. VERNANT, *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979); the collection of essays by different authors: *Le Sacrifice dans l'Antiquité* (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1981). Visual representations of animal sacrifice in Greek Antiquity have been studied by F. T. VAN STRATEN, *Hiera Kala: Images of Animal Sacrifices in Archaic and Classical Greece* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). The books referred to above provide extensive bibliographies for further consultation.

(17) E.g. R. J. DALY, *Christian Sacrifice: The Judeo-Christian Background Before Origen* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1978).

### *Survival of sacrifice in Late Antiquity*

Before going into an exploration of animal sacrifices within the system of Christian ritual, let us review briefly the state of Hellenic cults and practice of pagan sacrifices in Late Antiquity, in the period when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

A great many sources demonstrate that pagan cults did not disappear immediately with the advance of Christianity.<sup>18</sup> Certain rituals appeared to be deeply rooted in the society and were very hard to extirpate. The ceremonial of animal sacrifice constituted an inherent part of the Hellenic pagan religion and turned out to be one of such intractable customs.

The eradication of paganism with its deeply embedded rites and practices became one of the long-lasting struggles to be faced by the first Christian Emperors. After the formal introduction of Christianity on the terrain of the Holy Roman Empire a number of decrees and laws were promulgated recurrently censoring the Hellenic cults and, particularly, the public ceremonies that involved the offering of sac-

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(18) The process of Christianization and lingering pagan practices, especially sacrifices, are fairly well studied. I do not consider it necessary, therefore, to enter into the discussion of survival of animal sacrifices as a part of the old religious systems. This subject has been comprehensively presented in several works of F. R. Trombly, who studied a vast number of epigraphic, hagiographic, and legal data that irrefutably document the persistence of animal sacrifices even into the ninth century. See, for instance: F. R. TROMBLEY, *Paganism in the Greek World at the End of Antiquity: The Case of Rural Anatolia and Greece*, *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985) 327–352; IDEM, *Monastic Foundation in Sixth-century Anatolia and Their Role in the Social and Economic Life in the Countryside*, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30 (1985) 45–59; IDEM, *The Survival of Paganism in the Byzantine Empire during the Pre-Iconoclastic Period (540–727)* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1981). One of his recent studies contains also a comprehensive bibliography: F. R. TROMBLEY, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization, C. 370–529*, 2 vols. (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1995). Evidence of surviving pagan sacrificial customs in Early Medieval Europe is analyzed by B. Filotas in chapter 2.6 of his book: B. FILOTAS, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Cultures in Early Medieval Pastoral Literature* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2005) 105 ff.; see especially pp. 108–110 on animal sacrifices. See also K. W. HARL, *Sacrifice and Pagan Belief in Fifth- and Sixth-Century Byzantium*, *Past and Present* 128 (1990) 6–27; K. DOWDEN, *European Paganism: The Realities of Cult from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) 167–175.

rifices.<sup>19</sup> The earliest legislative acts aimed at repression of the pagan sacrifice date to the reign of Constantine the Great.<sup>20</sup> Following Constantinian law, a row of other edicts and decrees were promulgated by Constantine's successors who directed their imperial codifications against the pagan cults and sacrificial rituals.<sup>21</sup>

The process of eradication of the Hellenic religion was very much reversed through the reigns of Julian the Apostate (361–363) and Valens (364–378), under whom the previous legislation against sacrifice became largely a formality.

Thereafter, the composition and publication of the *Theodosian Code*, with its laws being officially enacted in 438, put the repression of pagan sacrifices on a new footing. This collection revived the imperial edicts of the previous century, which proves that the reality of ongoing sacrifice and other manifestations of pagan religion was still patent at that time. Consequently, the laws compiled into a collection of Theodosius II (408–450) reflect, if anything, the survival of Hellenic cults and their obstinate sacrifices.

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(19) The legislations of the first Christian emperors of the Roman Empire were published in the compilation of the laws known as the *Codex Theodosianus* (*C. Th.*), edited by Th. MOMMSEN, *Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus sirmondianis* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1905). The problems of making, purpose and sources of the *Theodosian Code* are discussed in the collection: J. HARRIES, I. WOOD (eds.), *The Theodosian Code: Studies in the Imperial Law of Late Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 1993). For English translation of the Code accompanied by commentary, glossary and bibliography see C. PHARR, *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1952).

(20) The decrees were promulgated on December 17, 320 (*C. Th.* 16.10.1) and December 25, 323 (*C. Th.* 16.2.5). For discussion of the historicity of Constantine's proscription of sacrifice see T. D. BARNES, Constantine's Prohibition of Pagan Sacrifice, *The American Journal of Philology* 105/1 (1984) 69–72. Barnes' discussion of Constantinian laws against sacrifice is a response to the arguments propounded by H. A. Drake in the review of T. D. BARNES, *Constantine and Eusebius* in *The American Journal of Philology* 103/4 (1982) 462–466.

(21) The list of imperial decrees against sacrifice by the first Christian Emperors is provided in P.-P. JOANNOU, *La législation impériale et la christianisation de l'empire romain (311–476)* (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1972) (OCA 192). Some of the early legislations proscribing sacrifices were promulgated in 341 (*C. Th.* 16.10.2); 353 (*C. Th.* 16.10.5); 356 (*C. Th.* 16.10.6); 364 (*C. Th.* 9.16.7); 381 (*C. Th.* 16.10.7); 392 (*C. Th.* 16.10.12); 435 (*C. Th.* 16.10.25), etc.

The *Theodosian Code* was not the last legislation against the manifestations of the pagan religion however, and the pagan sacrifice continued to be censored in the imperial edicts even through the mid-eighth century. The *Ecloga* of the emperors Leo III and Constantine V attests that the pagan sacrifice had place in the Mid-Byzantine milieu.<sup>22</sup> This legal document compiled in the eighth century explicitly addressed and sought to suppress the pagan practice of sacrifice that still occurred at that time.

As a matter of fact, the imperial laws systematically dealt with the public ceremonial, addressing the private pagan practices only sporadically. The private pagan sacrifice lingered about in the Late Antique subculture after the cessation of the public sacrificial rituals. Thus, the private sacrifice proved to be ineradicable even by the most stringent penalties, whereas the public sacrifices declined by the late fourth century and virtually ceased in the cities by the early fifth century. With the greatest secrecy or, at times, with the connivance of civil officials, private sacrifice continued to be performed at the later stages of Late Antiquity and gradually drifted into the realm of “popular” religion. As it happens, the existence of a law does not presuppose widespread public obedience to it and practice can be often found at variance with prescribed norms.

Conversion to Christianity often took the form of forceful measures, such as legislations and administrative methods aimed at suppressing the local pagan cults and rituals connected with them. Yet it was noticed already in the early centuries of the Christian era, as revealed by some sources which will be discussed later, that a more efficient way of conversion was not a complete eradication of old rituals and cultural customs, but their adaptation to the new religion — the process that is defined as the “Christianization of rituals” in modern scholarship.<sup>23</sup>

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(22) “Οἱ ἀποστάται καὶ θυσίας καὶ ναοὺς ποιοῦντες κατηγορεῖσθωσαν ἀπὸ παντὸς ἀνθρώπου· καὶ εἰ μὲν ἀπὸ ἐλλήνων χριστιανοὶ ἐγένοντο καὶ ἐβαπτίσθησαν, τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ὑπόκεινται τιμωρίᾳ.” *Appendix* 3.16. L. BURGMANN, Sp. TROIANOS, *Appendix Eclogae*, in: D. SIMON (ed.), *Fontes Minores III* (Frankfurt on Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1979) 105. An English translation of this important source has been made by E. H. FRESHFIELD, *A Manual of Roman Law: The Ecloga Published by the Emperors Leo III and Constantine V of Isauria at Constantinople A.D. 726* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926) 115–141.

(23) For the discussion of the phenomenon of “Christianization of rite,” cf. TROMBLEY, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization*, vol. 1, 147–168.

In fact, the process of “Christianization of rite” was not a short-term event, but it subsisted over a period of many centuries; in this regard, Late Antiquity witnessed the most intensive phase of Christianization. The old pagan rituals that underwent some sort of alteration and adjustment to the new religious system are called “Christianized” rites. Respectively, the expression “Christianized animal sacrifice” is used to refer to the ritual of animal sacrifice that was modified and infused with new meaning in accordance with the system of Christian beliefs. It is therefore legitimate to speak about a special Christianized form of animal sacrifice, which, in spite of superficial similarities, differed substantially in expression and conceptualization from its explicitly pagan counterpart.

Some reservations however should be made. Although the term “Christianized sacrifices” is a conventional way to refer to the phenomenon of animal sacrifice practiced in the Christian context, it is not an entirely adequate way to address this particular custom. The term “Christianized sacrifice” usually presupposes that the Christian rite evolved from its pagan model; that is to say, such formulation implies the conversion of a pagan ritual by emptying it of its primary content and giving it a new Christian meaning. Yet, this was not always the case. We do possess some records, treated below, that clearly point to the adaptation of specifically pagan rituals to the needs of the new religion. Yet on the other hand, some evidence suggests that the ritual slaying of animals naturally evolved from the Jewish, or rather Old Testament, sacrificial system, and not from the Hellenic paganism. Animal sacrifice, from this point of view, is the Christian continuation of the Old Testament Jewish ceremonial practice. If true, such a perspective would call for a different terminology, and a formulation “Christian animal sacrifice” would do more justice. By now, there is no uniformity of opinion as to this disputed issue of the origins of the phenomenon of sacrificing animals in the Christian culture; it is not impossible, though, that the two religious systems — Hellenic paganism and Old Testament Judaism — played a role in the development and shaping of a Christian variant of the rite of animal sacrifice.<sup>24</sup> Thus, although I adhere to a traditional usage of the term “Christianized sacrifices”, the above reservation should be kept in mind.

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(24) The mixed origins of the Christianized sacrifices were noted by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain who proscribed contemporary practices of *kourbania* as the renewal of both Hellenic and Jewish sacrificial traditions (Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, *Πηδάλιον*, 309, n. 2).

### *Animal sacrifice in the Christian West*

There are several sources that evidence the practice of Christianized sacrificial rituals in the Western parts of Christendom. A vivid description of miracles connected with the enactment of animal sacrifice can be found in the poem 20 of Paulinus of Nola. This poem is the twelfth of the *natalicia* cycle written for the feast day of St. Felix — the saint with whom animal offerings were usually associated.<sup>25</sup> Supernatural help in fulfilling the author's yearly vow on the feast of St. Felix provided him with a theme to narrate a chain of similar marvellous events:

Felix's birthday was now blossoming as it had in previous years, but I had nothing with which to mount the feast which my vow had made annual. The day was drawing near, and I had no resource available of any kind. But suddenly my well-endowed patron bestowed on me two hogs and a calf with which to spread a generous table, and from their flesh the poor were fed.<sup>26</sup>

From the poem 20 of Paulinus of Nola it is clear that offerings of animals, mostly species of pigs and oxen, were enacted by farmers in fulfilment of their vows. The meat of the slaughtered animals was meant to be distributed to the poor of the neighbourhood which, if failed to be observed, could provoke a severe punishment. Instant retribution for a failure to discharge a vow in its entirety and a greedy appropriation of a major part of the flesh is the plot of the first narrative. After repentance and fervent prayer to St. Felix, the farmer who was struck by an illness resolved to give all the appropriated parts of the sacrificed animal to the poor and made a miraculous recovery.

He ordered the hog to be brought, and then all the parts of it to be given to the poor. For himself he asked only that life be granted and that his food be the sight of plenty being given to the poor. ... The needy, their hunger satisfied, offered words of thanks to God, and their sated bellies asked pardon for the donor. As soon as the vow has been duly completed, the debtor was loosed from the grasp of the inner bonds he had incurred. His feet were healed by the Lord's

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(25) The *natalicia* poems were devoted to the feast that marked the entry of St. Felix into eternal life, that is his physical death, which was celebrated on January 14. The twentieth poem has been dated to January 406. Cf. P. G. WALSH (trans.), *The Poems of St. Paulinus of Nola* (New York: Newman Press, 1975) 6.

(26) *The Poems of St. Paulinus of Nola*, 157.

pity, and like a horse released or a bird breaking a snare he rushed forth, skipping along like a bounding deer.<sup>27</sup>

The second miracle recounts how some farmers, coming to Nola from the region beyond Beneventum, could not bring the fattened hog as a vow because it was too overweight to walk on its feet. They were bound, therefore, to replace it with a number of piglets they deemed equivalent to the motionless animal. How great was their wonder when they saw the hog miraculously ready and, seemingly, even willing to be slaughtered in one of the cottages on their way back from Nola. How the hog could find the way to an unknown region was a question that bewildered the author.<sup>28</sup>

The third story is a sentimental description of a heifer, promised as a gift-offering from its birth, that fiercely refused to be yoked into a wagon, yet surrendered with pleasure when brought to be sacrificed:

The heifer which had revolted and refused human bonds was led without a struggle to a peaceful death. Unschooled by the yoke, it offered its neck to the axe. It joyfully poured out its blood to fulfil its masters' vow, and to provide the poor with food from its slaughtered body.<sup>29</sup>

These preposterous yet somewhat comical stories related by Paulinus of Nola could point to the continuing existence of animal sacrifices in the Italian Campagna at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries. Animals were sacrificed in fulfilment of a vow to a saint or martyr. All of the examples disclose that vital elements of sacrifice were feasting the community and distributing the meat of the slaughtered animals to the poor.

That sacrificial offerings continued to be practiced in a Christian context in other Roman provinces can also be inferred from an accusation expressed by Faustus, to which Augustine gives an extensive apologetic response in his *Contra Faustum*. It is usually interpreted as speaking of animal sacrifices which instead of being offered to idols were transformed for the veneration of martyrs:

You have turned their [i.e. gentiles'] sacrifices into love-meals, idols into martyrs, whom you venerate with similar offerings; you appease ghosts of the dead with wine and sacrificial feasts; you celebrate the

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(27) *The Poems of St. Paulinus of Nola*, 163–164.

(28) *Ibid.*, 167–170.

(29) *Ibid.*, 172.

sacred days of the gentiles together with them ... but certainly you do not change anything about your life.<sup>30</sup>

In his *De civitate Dei* Augustine also explains the practice of sacrificial offerings that was apparently misunderstood already in his times and perceived as if honouring not God but the martyrs themselves. Here, the point of contention is not the futility of animal sacrifices in general, but their correct application: Augustine defends the Christian practices of venerating martyrs with sacrifices offered at their shrines as indeed directed to the God of the martyrs and not the martyrs themselves:

But which of the faithful has ever heard a priest standing at an altar, even one built over the holy body of a martyr for the honour and worship of God, say when he prayed, 'I offer sacrifice to thee, O Peter, or Paul, or Cyprian?' For it is to God that sacrifices are offered at their memorials, Who made them both men and martyrs, and united them in heavenly honour with the holy angels. We celebrate such sacrifices both so that we may give thanks to the true God for their victories, and so that, as we renew our memory of them, we may urge ourselves to imitate them in winning such crowns and palms, invoking the same God to our aid.<sup>31</sup>

Afterwards, however, Augustine notes that the better-instructed Christians in most countries do not generally practice such a custom. Yet even if there are some who still offer sacrifices at the shrines of the martyrs, Augustine concludes, those who offer them know that these are not sacrifices to the martyrs but to their God.<sup>32</sup>

At the dawn of the seventh century, the Pope Gregory the Great wrote to Mellitus, bishop of London, a letter full of wise instructions and practical advice for efficient conversion of the local inhabitants to Christianity. This letter, partially adduced by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History*, is famous for the concessions counseled by the Pope in the process of advancing Christianity among the heathen population. With great eagerness for the spread of Christianity, Gregory advised against

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(30) J. ZYCHA (ed.), *Sancti Aveli Augustini De utilitate credendi, de duabus animabus, contra Fortunatum, contra Adimantum, contra epistolam fundamenti, contra Faustum* (Vienna: Tempusky, 1891) (CSEL 25), 538. It has been suggested that "offerings" (*votes*) in this context mean animal sacrifices. Cf. CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 80, note *a*; TIXERONT, *Le rite du matal...*, 88–93.

(31) R. W. DISON (ed. and trans.), Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 357.

(32) *Ibid.*, 357.

the fanatic destruction of the pagan temples. He suggested that upon a removal of idols a due ritual of consecration consisting of sprinkling with water, setting up the altars and deposition of relics should be performed. In this manner the *fana idolorum* should be turned to good use for the purposes of the new religion and the service of the true God: "When this people see that their shrines are not destroyed they will be able to banish error from their hearts and be more ready to come to the places they are familiar with, but now recognizing and worshipping the true God."<sup>33</sup> Thereafter, the Pope Gregory the Great made similar allowance for the old rituals of animal sacrifices, which did not have to be entirely prohibited and eliminated, but used up and carefully infused with a new meaning to the glory of the true God.

And because they are in the habit of slaughtering much cattle as sacrifices to devils, some solemnity ought to be given then in exchange for this. So on the day of the dedication or the festival of the holy martyrs, whose relics are deposited there, let them make themselves huts from the branches of trees around the churches which have been converted out of shrines, and let them celebrate the solemnity with religious feasts. Do not let them sacrifice animals to the devil, but let them give thanks to the Giver of all things for His bountiful provision. Thus while some outward rejoicings are preserved, they will be able more easily to share in inward rejoicings. It is doubtless impossible to cut out everything at once from their stubborn minds: just as the man who is attempting to climb to the highest place, rises by steps and degrees and not by leaps.<sup>34</sup>

Gregory found justification for his conceding to the pagan custom in the Old Testament example of the Israelites keeping the Egyptian tradition of sacrifice. With reference to Leviticus 17:1–9, Gregory reminded that the Lord "preserved in his own worship the forms of sacrifice which they were accustomed to offer to the devil and commanded them to kill animals when sacrificing to him."<sup>35</sup> Thus animal sacrifices, though outwardly similar, remained no more the same: they profoundly differed in their meaning since they were offered to the true God and not to the idols.

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(33) B. COLGRAVE, R. A. B. MYNORS (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) 107.

(34) *Ibid.*, 107–109. Cf. CONYBEARE, *The Survival of Animal Sacrifices...*, 87–88; TIXERONT, *Le rite du matal...*, 89.

(35) *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 109.

This unequivocal allowance for the sacrificial practices of the newly converted people reveals how and why some pagan rituals became integrated into Christian culture. In this respect, the letter is a unique voice from the past expressing the official ecclesiastical view of condoning the practice of animal sacrifice along with other elements of the ancient pagan religion. Pagan ritual practices, no doubt, were accepted into the Christian tradition only upon a relevant adaptation — the process known as “Christianization” of ritual. Another aspect that should be emphasized in the context of the present enquiry — as a valuable backdrop to the description of sacrifices conducted by Justinian at the dedication of St Sophia in the *Diegesis* — is the advice to conduct animal sacrifices in connection with the Christian feast of the dedication. It appears from this passage that there was a special association of the church dedication feasts with the ritual immolation of animals.

A custom of sacrificing an animal at Easter is also testified to among the liturgical practices of the Roman Church. Some ninth-century authors record that such a custom of offering a paschal lamb, which was subsequently consumed by the priests and all the faithful, was still in use in the church at their times. Eneus of Paris made a note of the accusations uttered by the Greeks against Latins who had offered a lamb, according to the Jewish custom, placing it on the altar along with the Eucharistic offering of the body and blood of Christ.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Walafrid Strabo speaks about offering a paschal lamb as an ancient vestige that originated from the Jewish superstitions and was transmitted into his own times, but recently constricted to a great extent by the efforts of the “wise.” He recounts that the lamb was placed next to or under the altar on the day of Easter, consecrated with an appropriate benediction, and consumed on the same day of the Resurrection before any other “corporeal meal.”<sup>37</sup> Although Eneus of Paris and Walafrid Strabo do not speak explicitly of ritual immolation of the lamb, yet the com-

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(36) *Liber adversos Graecos*, praefatio (PL 121, 690A): “...quare agnum simul cum corpore Christi et sanguine in Pascha super altare ponamus, et more Iudaeorum offeramus.”

(37) *De rebus ecclesiasticis*, xviii (PL 114, 938D–939A): “Unde quorundam simplicium error de iudaicarum superstitionum seminario natus, et ad nostra usque tempora quaedam vetustatis extendens vestigia, iam ex magna parte sapientium studio compressus est... Illum dico errorem quo quidam agni carnes in Pascha, iuxta vel sub altari eas ponentes, benedictione propria consecrabant, et in ipsa resurrectionis die ante caeteros corporales cibos de ipsiis carnibus percipiebant.”

parison of the offering to the Jewish customs would imply that the animal was indeed perceived as a sacrifice.

Another piece of evidence confirming that the Medieval Roman Church practiced ritual offering of a paschal lamb comes from a letter of the twelfth-century Armenian bishop Nerses Shnorhali (d. 1173).<sup>38</sup> He speaks of the local Armenian custom of immolating a lamb at Easter as received from Rome by Gregory the Illuminator. The letter implies that this custom was still observed in his times by the Franks, even with greater care than by the Armenians.

And although the rules laid down by our Illuminator are to be received, as proceeding from the Holy Spirit; nevertheless he did not by his own authority institute the custom of sacrificing the lamb at the Pascha, but he received it from the Roman Church, and he handed it onto us, just as it is kept up at the present time all over the Church of the Franks, with greater diligence and care than we exercise. For they after they have roasted the lamb, lay it inside the *tabernacle* under the sacrifice on the day of Pascha; and after they have communicated in the Mystery, the priest divides, and gives a portion to each; and they eat it up in the church itself before they partake of any ordinary food.<sup>39</sup>

The elements of ceremonial offering and eating of a paschal lamb, if not necessarily its official sacrifice, continued to be practiced in the Roman church. The twelfth-century *Ordo* states that it was the custom to eat the meal of a lamb right after the Easter mass.<sup>40</sup> There are references to such a ritual performed at the papal court even at a much later period. An instance of a similar practice in the seventeenth century is adduced by the editor of the Greek *Euchologion*, J. Goar. Defending the old Byzantine ritual in his notes to the prayer for a paschal lamb (which will be examined in due turn), the seventeenth-century editor

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(38) CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 77–85;

(39) English translation by CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 82; see also the discussion of this fragment by TIXERONT, *Le rite du matal...*, 92, and ЛУРЬЕ, *Из Иерусалима в Аксум...*, 158, note 52.

(40) *Romani ordines* XI.48, XII.35 (*PL* 78, 1044D–1045A, 1079B–1080A). Cf. CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 513–514; A. SHARF, *Animal Sacrifice in the Armenian Church*, *Revue des études arméniennes* 14 (1982) 434; TIXERONT, *Le rite du matal...*, 93.

referred to a similar contemporary custom practiced by the Pope and tacitly accepted by the Roman Church.<sup>41</sup>

### *The Armenian tradition of animal sacrifice*

We have already referred to the sacrificial practices of the Armenians; now it is time to deal with their tradition in detail. The custom of animal sacrifice in the Armenian culture received a dominant place in the scholarly explorations of this phenomenon.<sup>42</sup> The importance of the Armenian material lies in the fact that this culture has the most distinct and long-lasting tradition of Christianized animal sacrifice. The sources disclose that sacrifices have been a regular part of the Christian Armenian culture from the early centuries of the Christian State and survived into the modern age. Another reason for a special attention to the Armenian ritual, though rarely noted, lies in the fact that the Medieval Armenian liturgical practices often reflect a very old layer of the Early Byzantine liturgy.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the presence and long-lasting popularity of animal sacrifice in the Armenian ecclesiastical culture might indicate the existence of a similar custom in the pre-Byzantine liturgy of, particularly, Palestine as well as other regions of the Christian Orient.

The tradition holds that the animal sacrifices in Armenia were enjoined by Gregory the Illuminator himself, soon after he converted to Christianity the last pagan king of Armenia, Tiridates III (298–330). According to the version recounted in the canons traditionally attributed to Sahak (387–439),<sup>44</sup> Gregory did this in response to the complaints of

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(41) J. GOAR, *Euchologion sive rituale Graecorum* ([Reprint] Graz: Akademische druck. Verlagsanstalt, 1960) 567.

(42) Sacrificial rituals are also attested to among other Eastern Christian communities, as those of Georgia, Syria and Mesopotamia. They, however, escaped the detailed scrutiny of scholars, contrary to the case of the famous Armenian ritual of *matał*. On animal sacrifices among the Palestinian Arab Christians see A. JAUSSEN, "L'immolation chez les nomades à l'est de la mer Morte, *Revue biblique* n.s. 3 (1906) 91–114. Conybeare adduces some contemporary evidence on the rite of animal sacrifice as still practiced in east Syria: CONYBEARE, *Survival of Animal Sacrifices...*, 82–84. For Georgian rituals, see ЛУРЬЕ, *Из Иерусалима в Аксум...*, 205, and F. CUMONT, *St. George and Mithra 'The Cattle-Thief'*, *Journal of Roman Studies* 27/1 (1937) 63–71.

(43) PALLAS, *La 'Thalassa' dans l'Église Chrétienne...*, 113.

(44) F. C. CONYBEARE, *The Armenian Canons of St. Sahak, Catholicos of Armenia (390–39 A.D.)*, *American Journal of Theology* 2 (1898) 828–848.

the sons of the pagan priests, who had previously been supported in their service to pagan cults by portions of the offerings. With the conversion to the new religion and abolition of the animal sacrifices, they had no other means to sustain their living. Gregory, therefore, decreed that the priests should be given a tithe of everything, as it was instituted for the Levitical priests under the Law of the Old Testament. There also followed a detailed list of the parts of the animals that were to be given to the priests.<sup>45</sup> Although other accounts reason the introduction of animal sacrifices in different ways, it is usually Gregory who is credited with perpetuation and adaptation of the custom.<sup>46</sup>

The so-called "canons of Sahak" give clear instructions as to when the ritual had to be observed. According to this collection of rules, the sacrifice of *matal* was offered on special occasions. First of all, at Easter, the paschal lamb was immolated. Animals could be sacrificed on dominical feasts, such as Epiphany, Pentecost and, possibly, Transfiguration. The sacrifices could take place every Sunday and, in commemoration of the dead — on the third, ninth, and fortieth day after the decease. The offering of animals was to be made on the feast days of the principal saints and on the day of the dedication of the altar, which was a part of the church dedication ritual. The latter occasion was supposedly meant to imitate the ceremony conducted by Solomon at the dedication of the Temple of Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> Yet another version traces the ritual immolations during the celebration of church dedication back to Constantine the Great who, along with his mother Helena and the Pope Silvester, allegedly celebrated the dedication of the Anastasis church in Jerusalem with lavish animal sacrifices.<sup>48</sup>

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(45) This is the version recounted in the canons attributed to St. Sahak which was written, probably, before the year 440; similar explanation of the history of *matal* is contained in a letter written by the twelfth-century bishop Nerses Shnorhali. English translation of the texts is given by CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 67–71 and 77–85.

(46) For the sources recording other versions of the introduction of animal sacrifices in Armenia, see SHARF, *Animal Sacrifice...*, 418–419.

(47) This is assumed on the basis of the spurious *Canons of St. Thaddeus* (CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 76; TIXERONT, *Le rite du matal...*, 82; SHARF, *Animal Sacrifice...*, 422). The evidence of the *Canons* will be discussed later.

(48) This tradition will be discussed below. Cf. CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 76, n. a; TIXERONT, *Le rite du matal...*, 82; SHARF, *Animal Sacrifice...*, 422.

One of the integral elements of the full *matał* ceremony was the banquet following the sacrifices. Save for Easter, when only household members shared the meal, the poor were necessarily invited to participate in the celebration, called *agape* similar to the early Christian tradition of a love-meal. Thus, for instance, the Armenian text (traditionally attributed to the catholicus John Mandakuni (478–490), but which might have been a later composition) while condemning the detestable sacrifices of an animal acquired by robbery or in another immoral way encouraged welcoming the poor to banquets in response to the words of Christ:

Why then should any one dare to offer such sacrifices as are abominable and an occasion to Gehenna, or to destroy the welcome of the poor to his banquet by the honours he pays to the powerful and the rich, who want not? This is what Christ forbade when he said: Whenever thou holdest a feast or a reception of the poor, invite not thy brethren or thy neighbours or thy friends, nor the wealthy, in order that they too may invite thee, and so there may be to thee a return. But whenever thou holdest a reception for the salvation of thy soul, invite the poor and the maimed, the blind and the halt. And blessed art thou, for there shall be to thee a return in the kingdom of the righteous.<sup>49</sup>

Along the same lines, the catholicus Nerses II (548–557) asserted that “in the agapes the priests shall not venture to carry off portions according to the canons, but shall give them to the poor there and then in the presence of the master of the agape.”<sup>50</sup>

At the later stages, probably by the ninth century, a complete system was created, codifying the rules for selecting the victim and fixing the rituals to be followed for different kinds of *matał*.<sup>51</sup> The surviving prayers for different instances of animal sacrifices reveal more the nature of the given custom. It is clear from these prayers that the development of the Armenian ritual was influenced by the Jewish system of animal sacrifices and it was exactly this feature that was frequently imputed to the Armenians.<sup>52</sup> In spite of the numerous parallels with

(49) CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 74.

(50) *Ibid.*, 75.

(51) See the documents illustrating the history of the rites of *matał* presented by CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 67–85.

(52) The “Jewishness” of Armenian sacrifices was often despised and condemned in the anti-Armenian polemics. For instance, such attitudes are

the Jewish sacrifices, some scholars still insisted on the pagan character of Armenian *matal*.<sup>53</sup> It seems likely that though the ritual itself may have developed on the basis of old pagan rites, as the story of Gregory's adaptation of the old religious rituals recounts, it was profoundly influenced and modified by the Jewish rituals of animal sacrifice. The features that the ritual acquired in the process of its adjustment to the Christian liturgy make it indeed resemble the Old Testament sacrifices,<sup>54</sup> which are often recalled in the prayers accompanying the ceremony of *matal*. Thus, for instance, the prayer that is a part of the canon for animal sacrifice evokes the biblical examples of Abel, Noah, and Abraham:

... thou has pleased that our kind should worship and adore thee with altars and sacrifices of good things, even such as Abel the just presented onto thee, and as Noah when he went forth from the ark and offered a sacrifice that smelled with a sweet savour unto the Lord God; and Abraham presented before thee the true whole burnt-offering of trial and testing, which foreshadowed thy inviolate death upon the cross.<sup>55</sup>

illustrated in the writing of the Armenian renegade catholicus Isaac: "Οὗτοι οὖν οἱ θεομάχοι Ἀρμένιοι, πάλιν τὰς Ἰουδαϊκὰς θυσίας ἀνακαινίζοντες, καὶ βόας καὶ ἄμνους καὶ πρόβατα θύοντες, δι' αὐτῶν ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν λαβεῖν ἐλπίζοντες, καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς τὰς ἐλπίζας ἔχοντες, καὶ διὰ τῆς αὐτῶν μεταλήψεως ἀγιασθῆναι νομίζοντες, καὶ ἐν ταῖς τοιαύταις θυσίαις καὶ οὐκ ἐν τῷ σώματι, καὶ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ καυχώμενοι, πῶς οὐκ εἰσὶ προφανῶς Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ χριστομάχοι;" (*Oratio invectiva contra Armenios*, Oratio I, PG 132, 1184B l.14–C8). The *Panoplia Dogmatica* of Euthymius Zygadenus also reveals that the Armenian sacrifices were regarded as Jewish, and not pagan: "Τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τὰς ζωοθυσίας παύσαντος ἐν τῷ μεταδούναι τοῖς μαθηταῖς τοῦ μυστικοῦ δείπνου, καὶ εἰπεῖν, *Τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν*, τουτέστιν οὐ τὸ Ἰουδαϊκόν, ἀλλὰ τὸ τηρικαῦτα μυστικῶς παραδεδομένον, τὸνναντίον οἱ Ἀρμένιοι διαπράττονται, βόας, καὶ ἄμνους, καὶ πρόβατα θύοντες κατὰ τὴν Ἰουδαϊκὴν λατρείαν, καὶ τὰς φλιάς τοῖς τῶν τεθυμένων αἵμασι χρίοντες, καὶ τὰς ἐλπίδας τῆς σωτηρίας μᾶλλον ἐν τοῦτοις ἔχοντες" (PG 130, 1184C l. 10 – D l. 4).

(53) This view, in particular, is advocated in the article SHARE, Animal Sacrifice..., 417–449.

(54) The Armenian theologians, however, responding to frequent accusations had to develop explanations of how their sacrifices differed from the Jewish tradition. For the argument against the "Jewishness" of the Armenian *matal* see the epistle written by the twelfth-century bishop Nerses Shnorhali in CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 78–85.

(55) CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 55.

In a relevant prayer for the sacrifice of a paschal lamb, again, mention is made of the Patriarchs — Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — when pleading for increase and multiplication of the household of the person offering the sacrifice. The parallel with the Old Testament sacrifices is all the more evident: “And may this sacrifice be to thee for reconciliation, as was the sacrifice of Abel.”<sup>56</sup>

### *Animal sacrifices in Byzantine Christianity*

Having shown that animal sacrifice was a current phenomenon in the context of the Christian culture — be it the Eastern or Western tradition, Late Antique or Medieval period — it is time to turn to material pertaining specifically to the Byzantine milieu. The survival of animal sacrifices in the Byzantine tradition has been generally refuted. The writings of the Byzantine authors, from the early centuries of Christendom, overtly condemn and revile such customs. It was not just the authority of the New Testament that provided the background for attacks on the old religion of sacrifice. Often, a potent factor that gave birth to the Byzantine criticism of animal sacrifices was found in the writings of Greek sceptics and ascetic thinkers, who formed the schools of the Neo-Pythagoreans and Neo-Platonists.<sup>57</sup> A particularly vivid example containing such attitudes is the *Preparatio Evangelica* of Eusebius, who derived most of his arguments against animal sacrifices from Porphyry’s *De abstinentia*.<sup>58</sup>

An additional driving force behind the incrimination of the sacrificial rites that developed in the seventh century was the desire of the Byzantines to distance themselves from the liturgical practices of the Monophysite world that kept such customs alive and thriving.<sup>59</sup> Much of the condemnation of the animal sacrifices, therefore, has been expressed in polemics against the sacrificial customs of the Armenians. Most frequently, the criticism of the Armenian practices entailed a struggle against the “Jewishness” of their customs.

One of the sanctions addressing the customs of the Armenians (apparently those residing mainly in eastern Asia Minor and north-eastern Greece — parts, which were under Byzantine jurisdiction) was canon 99 of the Council in Trullo (692):

(56) CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 65.

(57) *Ibid.*, 89.

(58) Eusebius of Caesaria, *Preparatio Evangelica*, IV.9–20.

(59) ЛУРЬЕ, *Из Иерусалима в Аксум...*, 158–159.

We have heard that in the land of the Armenians the following also happens: there are some who boil pieces of meat on the holy altars and then offer to the priests those pieces set aside for them, apportioned in the Jewish fashion. In as much as we are responsible for keeping the church undefiled, we ordain that it be not permitted for any priest to accept portions of meat so set aside. They must be satisfied with those portions which the person providing the animal wishes to give them, and he must do the giving outside the church building. Any priest not acting accordingly is to be removed.<sup>60</sup>

This regulation is quite interesting and has already generated some bafflement among scholars.<sup>61</sup> Strangely enough, while censuring the practices of the distribution of meat to the priests, which plainly was just an element of *matał*, the canon does not address the practice of animal sacrifice itself. The twelfth-century canonist Theodore Balsamon, commenting on this rule, believed that animal sacrifice ceased to exist among the Armenians since Christianity had abolished it. In his commentary he stated that the custom of animal sacrifice had fallen into disuse and that the cooking and distribution of meat were the only vestiges of the ancient practices that were to be censured.<sup>62</sup> His explanation, however, is rather contrary to the existing data that overtly point to the fact that the Armenians did not abandon their rituals of *matał* neither in the times of the Council, nor in the period when Balsamon was compiling his commentary. For instance, among those listed in the catalogue of deviations from Orthodox dogma compiled by the twelfth-century monk Euthymius Zigadenus on the order of the emperor Alexius I (1081–1118), the Armenian practice of *matał* is described as still being in use:

Although our Lord, Jesus Christ, ended animal sacrifice by giving portions to his disciples from the mystical supper, and saying, “Do this in remembrance of me” — that is not the Jewish meal but that of which they had then mystically partaken — the Armenians do the opposite: they sacrifice bulls, lambs and sheep according to Jewish ritual, and then smear their doorposts with the blood of the victims, preferring to place in these their hopes of salvation. That is why they do not partake of the body and blood of the Lord at the

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(60) Translation by SHARF, *Animal Sacrifice...*, 435. G. A. RHALLES, M. POYLES (eds.), *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, vol. 2 (Athens: G. Charophylakos, 1852) 543.

(61) SHARF, *Animal Sacrifice...*, 435–439.

(62) PG 137, 860B–861A.

festival of Easter, but of a lamb, which they sacrifice in Jewish fashion and then roast, expecting thereby to be hallowed and released from their sins.<sup>63</sup>

Two other Byzantine polemical works against the Armenians written in the period close to that of Theodore Balsamon — one ascribed to St. Nicon (1059–1067)<sup>64</sup> and the second, already mentioned, by the twelfth-century renegade Armenian catholicus Isaac<sup>65</sup> — also make it clear that the *ματάλια*, being the Greek term for the Armenian *matał*, were far from being abandoned. All of this makes the canon regulation and then the explanation given by Balsamon more than curious in their silence, or ignorance, of the ritual of animal sacrifices.

A better reason for canon 99 of the Council in Trullo ignoring the ritual of the animal sacrifice, as suggested by Sharf,<sup>66</sup> could be that something very similar to *matał* could have existed among the Byzantines themselves. However dubious such an argument *ex silentio* can be, it is to this conclusion that the surviving Byzantine prayers for animal sacrifice point as well.

Indeed, a rather lucid parallel to the Armenian ritual of *matał* is found in Byzantine prayers for animal sacrifices.<sup>67</sup> Conybeare who, in-

(63) Translation by SHARF, *Animal Sacrifice...*, 438; Euthymius Zigadenus, *Panoplia Dogmatica* (PG 130, 1184D).

(64) CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 76: “Περὶ τῆς δυσσεβοῦς θρησκείας τῶν κακίστων Ἀρμενίων ... Ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ νομικὰ σχεδὸν πάντα, ἃ κατηγορήθησαν, εἰσέτι τελοῦσι. θύουσι γὰρ τὸν ἄμνον τῆ μεγάλης κυριακῆ, καὶ τὰς φλιάς χρίουσι, καὶ τὰ ὅσα τούτου καίοντες, τηροῦσι τὸν χοῦν μετὰ τοῦ αἵματος εἰς τύπον καθαρσίου ... καὶ μέντοι καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν θυσίας προβάτων καὶ βοῶν ποιοῦσι καὶ οὐκ ἄλλως ἡγούνται σωθήσεσθαι τὸν τεθνεῶτα εἰ μὴ ἐν τοῖς τρίτοις αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῖς ἐννάτοις καὶ τεσσαρακοστοῖς αἱ τοιαῦται θυσίαι ἐπιτελεσθῶσι. Πρὸ δὲ τοῦ τυθῆναι τὰ τοιαῦτα θύματα, ἄλας ἐπευλογοῦντες, εἰς τροφήν αὐτοῖς διδώσιν. Καὶ μέντοι καὶ ἐπὶ ταῖς κεφαλαῖς αὐτῶν, εὐχὰς τινας ἐπιλέγουσι, καὶ οὕτω σφάζουσιν, ὀνοματίζουσι δὲ τὰς τοιαύτας θυσίας Ματάλια.”

(65) “Αἴρεσις κη΄. Ἡ βδελυκτὴ θυσία κατὰ τῶν Ἑβραίων. Φέρουσι βοῦν ἢ κριὸν, καὶ γραμμαρίζουσι μετὰ βαμμάτων κοκκίνων, καὶ εἰς τὰ κέρατα αὐτῶν ὀπώρας παντοίας, καὶ φέρουσιν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν θύραν τῆς ἐκκλησίας, καὶ ἀλείφουσι μετὰ βουτύρου τὰ μέλη τοῦ βοός, εἴτε τοῦ κριοῦ. Καὶ θύουσιν αὐτὰ εἰς τὴν θύραν τῆς ἐκκλησίας· καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτὸ Δεσποτικὴν θυσίαν” (*Oratio invectiva contra Armenios*, *Oratio II*, PG 132, 1237A 1.1–8).

(66) SHARF, *Animal Sacrifice...*, 437.

(67) In his edition of the earliest manuscript of the *euchologion*, the eighth-century codex from the Barberini collection at Rome, J. Goar omitted more

cluding the prayer from the codex *Barberini gr. 336*<sup>68</sup> into his collection of sources on animal sacrifice along with other Byzantine prayers from later manuscripts, pointedly made note of the contradiction between the official “reviling of the Armenians” by the Byzantines and, at the same time, preservation of the “incriminated rites” in their own prayer collections.<sup>69</sup> The prayer for the sacrifice of a bull,<sup>70</sup> in the earliest manuscripts of the Byzantine *euchologion*, was to be read on a saint’s day and begged for material and spiritual blessings in a manner closely resembling that of the Armenian *Canon of Dominical blessing*.<sup>71</sup>

O thou in place of thy beloved Isaac didst accept the ram from the patriarch Abraham, and didst accept and wast well pleased with the widow’s offering laid before thee. Thou hast also commanded us thy sinful and unworthy servants to offer sacrifices of irrational animals and birds in behalf of our souls; do thou, Lord, king that lovest mankind, accept the offering of these thy servants laid before thee in commemoration of this thy holy one, and deign to lay it up in thy heavenly treasures; bestowing on them plenteously enjoyment of the goods of this world of thine along with all things that are to

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than a sixth part of the original texts of the manuscript. For the most part, it has been reasoned, his omissions were the texts for the offices that had long ago passed into the *Horologion*. Among the seven prayers that allegedly have been omitted by sheer accident, a prayer for the sacrifice of bulls can be found (A. STRITTMATTER, O. S. B., *The Barberinum S Marci* of Jacques Goar, *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 47 (1933) 329–367). Recently a new edition of the *Euchologion Barberini* has been made which includes the parts omitted earlier: S. PARENTI, E. VELKOVSKA (eds.), *L’eucologio Barberini gr. 336*. (Roma: Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000).

(68) It has been convincingly argued that this *euchologion*, the oldest known today, represents the Italo-Greek recension of the Byzantine rite. Narrower dating has been also suggested: the second half of the eighth century. The questions of provenance and dating are briefly treated in the introduction to the recent edition of Parenti and Velkovska (*L’eucologio Barberini gr. 336...*, 19–21). An important contribution to the discussion of dating is made by Ch. KONSTANTINIDIS, *L’Ordo de la dédicace des Églises selon le rite byzantin vers la moitié du VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in: *Πεπραγμένα τοῦ Θ’ διεθνοῦς βυζαντινολογικοῦ συνεδρίου* (Thessaloniki: Myrtide, 1956) 206–215.

(69) CONYBEARE, *Survival of Animal Sacrifices...*, 80.

(70) *Εὐχή ἐπὶ θυσίας βοῶν*; PARENTI, VELKOVSKA, *L’eucologio Barberini gr. 336...*, 213.

(71) For the Armenian *Canon of Dominical Blessing* and the variety of prayers on different occasions of *matał*, see CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 54–67.

their interest. Fill full their granaries with fruit, corn, and wine and oil, and make their souls worthy to be full of faith and righteousness. Multiply their beasts and flocks. (For him) in whose behalf they bring to thee as ransom and in requital this animal, for sacrifice, let its fat be as an acceptable fragrantcy before thy holy glory, and the shedding of its blood bread of the richness of pity. Let the offering of its flesh be a healing of bodily sufferings. For not idly is this our task performed, but in commemoration of thy holy sufferings.<sup>72</sup>

In the same manuscript, there is also an equivalent prayer for the sacrifice of a lamb,<sup>73</sup> which meant, as a variant reading from the *Grottaferrata* manuscript confirms,<sup>74</sup> the sacrifice of a paschal lamb. In these prayers, similar to the Armenian canon, the Old Testament examples are regularly recalled.

Besides the prayer for the sacrifice in this earliest surviving manuscript of the *Euchologion*, a number of prayers are transmitted in later manuscripts representing regional or chronological variants.<sup>75</sup> Later collections included the prayers for the blessing of salt,<sup>76</sup> which the victim was made to eat — an element which was also a significant part of the Armenian *matał*, as well as of the ancient Jewish ritual: “with all of thy sacrifices shalt thou offer salt.”<sup>77</sup>

(72) Translation by CONYBEARE, *Survival of Animal Sacrifices...*, 80–81.

(73) *Εὐχὴ ἐπὶ τοῖς προσφέρουσιν ἀμνόν*; PARENTI, VELKOVSKA, *L'eucologio Barberini gr. 336...*, 218.

(74) In his edition of the prayer from the *Barberinus gr. 336*, CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 413, presented also variant readings from the manuscripts *Grottaferrata* Γ.β.10 and *Bodley Auct.* E.5.13.

(75) The collection of Byzantine *euchologia* by Dmitrievskij contains a number of prayers pertaining to animal sacrifices. Their titles and contents vary. Thus, codex *Sinaiticus gr. 959* (eleventh century), has *Εὐχὴ ἐπὶ προσφερόντων θυσίαν*; *Sinaiticus gr. 957* (tenth century.) — *Εὐχὴ ἐπὶ θυμαίων*; *Sinaiticus gr. 973* (twelfth century) — *Εἰς θύμα μνήμης ἁγίου*, *Εὐχὴ εἰς θυσίαν*; А. ДМИТРИЕВСКИЙ, *Описание литургических рукописей, хранящихся в библиотеках православного востока*, т. 2, *Εὐχολόγια* (Киев, 1901), 6, 46, 113, 451 (hereafter ДМИТРИЕВСКИЙ, II). Cf. also CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 414, 436–438.

(76) *Εὐχὴ ἐπὶ θυσίαν ἄλατος*; CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 437; ДМИТРИЕВСКИЙ, II, 113, 798.

(77) Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19; Ezekiel 43:24. For the place of salt in the Jewish rite see s.v. “salt” (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 14, cols. 710–711). In the Armenian tradition this ritual is believed to be introduced by Gregory the Illuminator himself to distinguish pagan sacrifices from Christian ones

These surviving prayers cannot be disregarded, as they often are in the study of the rituals of animal sacrifices. Indeed, they should be taken into consideration as the most valuable and irrefutable evidence. Even if the prayers continued to be copied when the ritual itself had already died out and some manuscripts preserving them reflect nothing but an outdated practice — which is apparently the case of the sixteenth-century manuscripts<sup>78</sup> — yet they remarkably confirm that such practices were current in the earlier stages of Byzantine liturgy.

The Byzantine prayers, however, should be considered in the context of their place of origin. The ritual recorded in the manuscripts of *Barberini* and *Grottaferrata*, transmitting the prayers for the animal sacrifices, represent predominantly the Byzantine rite as it was in use in parts of Italy. Therefore, the custom as reflected through these prayers should be associated with the periphery rather than the capital of the Byzantine Empire. Nevertheless, there is an implication that the Constantinopolitan liturgy was not devoid of the practice of animal sacrifices either: the earliest Constantinopolitan *euchologion* of the Paris codex *Coislin. gr. 213*<sup>79</sup> contains a similar prayer for the sacrifice of animals entitled *Εὐχὴ ἐπὶ θυσίας κτηνῶν*.<sup>80</sup>

The existence of Byzantine prayers strongly suggests that in spite of critique and hostile attitudes, animal sacrifices remained a current practice in the Byzantine Empire.

Contemporary customs of ritual immolations of animals that survived in some regions of Greece and Turkey have also been traced to Byzantine origins.<sup>81</sup> Ethnographers and folklorists have usually in-

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(cf. Armenian prayer for the consecration of salt: CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 57).

(78) Codex 134 of the library of the Holy Sepulchre in Constantinople (1584) has the prayers *εὐχὴ ἐπὶ θυσίων, εὐχὴ ἐπὶ θυσίας εἰς βοῦν*; ДМИТРИЕВСКИЙ, II, 806, 1054. Another sixteenth-century manuscript, 469 of the Dionysiou monastery at Athos (1572) contains *εὐχὴ ἐπὶ θυσίαν κτηνῶν* and *εὐχὴ ἐπὶ θυσίαν εἰς βοῦν*; ДМИТРИЕВСКИЙ, II, 798.

(79) This is the oldest surviving *euchologion* of Constantinople, copied in 1027 by the scribe Strategios, who was a chaplain of St Sophia. This *euchologion* is considered to be a redaction for a private usage, as deduced from a long series of devotional prayers: J. DUNCAN, *Coislin 213. Euchologe de la Grande Eglise. Dissertatio ad Lauream* (Rome, 1983).

(80) ДМИТРИЕВСКИЙ, II, 1014; DUNCAN, *Coislin 213...*, 149.

(81) Besides Armenian and Georgian sacrificial rites that have been practiced well into modern times (described in the works of CONYBEARE, *The Survival of Animal Sacrifices...*, *passim*, and ЛУРЬЕ, *Из Иерусалима в Аксум...*, 205)

terpreted the Modern Greek custom of sacrificing animals for certain feasts, the *kourbania*, as a survival of pagan Greek religion and considered it entirely alien to Greek Orthodox culture.<sup>82</sup> In doing so, they often imagined ancient and modern Greece as bound tightly together by religious continuity while failing to take notice of the whole intermediary period.<sup>83</sup> An alternative interpretation of this custom, placing it within the Judeo-Christian context, was propounded and advocated by Stella Georgoudi.<sup>84</sup> She convincingly associated the ritual of *kourbania* with Orthodox Byzantine culture and argued for the Jewish-Christian character of this custom. Her exploration of contemporary folk rituals against the background of hagiographical and liturgical data retrospectively applied the modern popular practices onto the Medieval times and corroborate the view that Byzantine tradition was in possession of a Christianized sacrificial system.

Animal sacrifices, when being eliminated or marginalized from the official ecclesiastical culture, settled conveniently in the sphere of popular religion<sup>85</sup> — the realm that often found its reflection in medieval

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there has been substantial material brought up concerning the Christianized animal sacrifices in Modern Greece and Turkey (cf. GEORGoudi, *L'égorgement sanctifié en Grèce moderne...*). The summary of studies devoted to the subject of contemporary sacrifices including some original descriptions of the ritual immolations in a Christian setting are presented by PALLAS, *La 'Thalassa' dans l'Église Chrétienne...*, 102–109.

(82) Out of the numerous studies produced on the issue of the relation between Modern Greek customs and the Hellenic pagan cults, still useful remain some older works: J. C. LAWSON, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion: A Study in Survivals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910); M. P. NILSSON, *Greek Popular Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947).

(83) A critique of such an approach has been poignantly expressed by C. Mango: "This field has been pre-empted by folklorists whose methods are a puzzle to the historian. It is not, of course, inconceivable that certain remnants of pagan beliefs and practices should have survived the conversion of the common people to Christianity and lived on for centuries, transformed and misunderstood, but to be convinced of the existence of such continuity, we need a chain of evidence that is simply not there" (C. MANGO, *Discontinuity with the Classical Past in Byzantium*, in: M. MULLETT, R. SCOTT (eds.), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Centre for Byzantine Studies, 1981) 55.

(84) GEORGoudi, *L'égorgement sanctifié en Grèce moderne...*, 271–307.

(85) F. R. TROMBLEY, *Popular Religion*, in: A. KAZHDAN et al. (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 3 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 1695–1696.

hagiographical texts. Thus hagiographical literature appears useful for gleaning evidence for reconstruction of Byzantine cultural and religious phenomena. Though it might be dangerous to claim the same trustworthiness of the hagiographical material as of what is generally considered more “serious” sources, such as chronicles and histories, yet hagiographical narratives have often proved to be valuable material for distilling reliable details of medieval history.<sup>86</sup> Even more so, they tend to reflect the *realia* of everyday life and culture that chronographers and historiographers considered too trivial to record — in this way, hagiography can provide unique insights into everyday life and ordinary practices not available from other types of sources.

Hagiographical legends, therefore, offer fascinating glimpses into popular Christianity, in the context of which the practice of animal sacrifice continued to flourish. The cult of St. George was particularly favoured with sacrificial offerings.<sup>87</sup> The cycle of miracles of St. George contains several allusions to animal sacrifices. A story that goes back probably to the fifth century relates the following incident.<sup>88</sup> A peasant called Theopistos made a promise to St. George to offer one of his two lost oxen as a sacrifice if the saint helped him to find them. After a su-

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(86) See, for example, an excellent article by F. HALKIN, Byzantine Hagiography in the Service of History, in: *Proceedings of the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Byzantine Studies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) 345–354.

(87) There seems to be a long-lasting connection between the ritual slaying of animals and the cult of St. George. In certain regions that experienced considerable Byzantine influence, sacrifices on the saint’s feast day have been continually practiced throughout the Middle Ages until our time. Most famous for this tradition is a Georgian region of Mingrelia. The seventeenth-century French traveller Jean Chardin visited the monastery of Ilori in Mingrelia. His notes preserve a detailed description of the feast of St. George that involved the immolation of a bull. Besides, he recorded the rituals of sacrificial offerings made on tombs (J. CHARDIN, *Voyage de monsieur le Chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l’Orient*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam, 1711) 78 ff., cited in: CUMONT, *St. George and Mithra...*, 63–65. In the same century the Russian legate Fedot Elchin described the celebration of the main Georgian feast of St. George that included the sacrifice of a bull and subsequent distribution of the meat (cf. ЛУРЬЕ, *Из Иерусалима в Аксум...*, 205). The curious Georgian custom was still in practice as late as the middle of the nineteenth century: its crucial element was the sacrifice of an ox which mysteriously entered the church ready for sacrifice on the day of the yearly festival of St George (CUMONT, *St. George and Mithra...*, 63).

(88) J. AUFHAUSER (ed.), *Miracula S. Georgii* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1913) 44–64.

pernatural revelation of the place where the two animals were peacefully feeding, Theopistos went back on his promise to St. George and offered just a kid. The saint appeared in a dream once again reminding Theopistos of his promise to offer one of his bulls and reassured the peasant of his presence at the sacrificial feast. Yet the farmer did not take seriously the warning of St. George and with the agreement of his wife decided to slaughter just a sheep and a little lamb. In spite of further threatening apparitions of the saint in dreams Theopistos continued in his obstinacy to not sacrifice the promised animal, persuading himself that what he saw in dreams was no more than his own imagination. When, however, St. George promised to send fire and burn him as well as his entire house, the intimidated man resolved to sacrifice all his livestock, which was the last order of the saint. The rich and the poor of the village, as well as the priests, all participated in the sacrificial feast and chanted liturgical hymns to the saint from the evening till the morning. In the end, as befits a hagiographical story, a miracle occurred: at the prayer of St. George, who came to the sacrifice as he had promised, all the animals came back to life in threefold number to the astonishment and wonder of the people.

Several references to animal sacrifices offered to the same saint are found in the collection of miracles preserved only in different Slavonic dialects.<sup>89</sup> Scholars generally agree that this collection of miracles existing only in Slavonic is a translation of older versions of Byzantine origin that have been lost. These accounts vividly depict life in the Medieval Greek milieu. Yet some scholars assume that two miracles recounting the events connected with Bulgarian history are local, that is Old Bulgarian, compositions.<sup>90</sup> Though the manuscripts of Slavonic miracles of St. George are later, dated to the fourteenth-seventeenth

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(89) Surviving manuscripts testify to the existence of Russian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian and Belo-Russian versions of miracles. For the discussion of the manuscripts, concise analysis of the collection, review of earlier scholarship and edition of the miracles see Б. АНГЕЛОВ, Сказание за железния кръст, in: ИДЕМ (ed.), *Из старата българска, руска и сръбска литература*, т. 3 (София, 1978) 61–98.

(90) The narratives supposedly of local Bulgarian origin are the following: “A miracle about an iron cross and about a Bulgarian” (in some manuscripts this miracle is divided into two: about deliverance of George the Bulgarian and about the healing of his wife) and “A miracle about Clement who was delivered by St. George in a battle,” (АНГЕЛОВ, *Из старата българска, руска и сръбска литература...*, 84–86 and 91–95 respectively). Both miracles refer to the events of the war of Tsar Symeon against the Hungarians.

century, the narratives allegedly reflect the society of the ninth-tenth centuries.<sup>91</sup>

Whatever the provenance of the original compositions, it does not have a major forbearance on the present discussion since animal sacrifices offered to St. George are an element common to the narratives of both Byzantine and arguably Slavonic origin and must represent the widespread tradition that originated early in the Byzantine milieu and was transmitted to other cultures as well, possibly along with the process of Christianization. Significantly, however, the compilation has been recognised as a valuable source revealing different aspects of political and cultural life of the communities, both Byzantine and Bulgarian, and disclosing a variety of religious and everyday customs. Therefore, the evidence of animal sacrifices, as recorded in the miracle accounts, should be given considerable weight. The frequency with which animal offerings are mentioned emphasizes the popularity and prominence of this ritual.

The fourth miracle of the collection, that has its setting in the military events of the Bulgarian war against the Hungarians, refers to animal sacrifices that were offered by the protagonist of the account, an unnamed Bulgarian soldier. After a miraculous escape from pursuing Hungarian horsemen, the Bulgarian soldier was counselled in a dream to buy another horse before going into the battle because the first one would die of a wounded leg. The man who appeared in a dream with a radiant face revealed himself as George, the slave of Christ. To him, upon waking, the Bulgarian soldier brought praises and before going to war called a priest who conducted the holy liturgy. As a part of the liturgical celebration a number of animals were slaughtered — oxen, sheep and pigs, ten of each species — and their meat was distributed to the poor.<sup>92</sup>

Another interesting miracle bears the title “about a herder who was bitten by a snake.” It narrates of a young lad who was nearing death because of the poisonous bite of a snake but was healed by the intervention of St. George through the intermediary of an old monk. Having escaped approaching death the young herder had to repent of a recent misdeed — he had sold some sheep in his herd which belonged to a widow, and had sworn to her that they had been eaten by wolves — and promised to return threefold for each sheep. He also

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(91) АНГЕЛОВ, *Из старата българска, руска и сръбска литература...*, 75.

(92) *Ibid.*, 86.

vowed to give to the poor the tenth part of his flock on St. George's day through to the end of his life.<sup>93</sup>

The plot of the ninth miracle from the same collection is also set in the war period. The soldier, this time named Clement, when praying for deliverance from Hungarian horsemen vowed to St. George to bring on his feast day quite abundant sacrificial offerings: cows, oxen, sheep, and pigs, ten of each kind. After he safely escaped, he made it a custom until the last days of his life to prepare banquets that lasted for three days on the feast day of the saint. On the first day all kinds of maimed people were invited, on the second — priests and monks, and, finally, on the third day Clement feasted his relatives and friends. All this time he devoted himself to serving his guests and to generous almsgiving.<sup>94</sup>

Another hagiographical source of considerable value for our reconstruction of the Byzantine ritual of animal sacrifices is the *Life of St. Nicholas of Sion*.<sup>95</sup> It has been assumed that the author of the life, who remains unknown, had recourse to some original records of the monastery and made good use of them, providing in his composition precise figures, names, itineraries, and even the ailments of those seeking cure at the monastery.<sup>96</sup> The historicity of this life, therefore, has been highly esteemed and its data drawn upon for the reconstruction of the social and economic situation in sixth-century rural Anatolia.<sup>97</sup>

Chapters 54–57 of the hagiographical narrative abound in detailed descriptions of the sacrificial offerings enacted by St. Nicholas. All of the animals slaughtered were oxen, which were sacrificed, without exception, at the shrines of martyrs and archangels in the Lycian hinterland. It can be construed from the discourse that the church officially sanctioned the sacrificial rituals since they were authoritatively conducted by the holy man himself and, at times, constituted a part of a larger liturgical celebration:

(93) АНГЕЛОВ, *Из старата българска, руска и сръбска литература...*, 90.

(94) *Ibid.*, 91–93.

(95) I. ŠEVČENKO, N. PATTERSON-ŠEVČENKO (text and trans.), *The Life of St. Nicholas of Sion* (Brookline, MA: Hellenic College Press, 1984).

(96) For a general discussion of the life see the introduction to the edition of Ihor Ševčenko and Nancy Patterson-Ševčenko.

(97) F. R. TROMBLEY, *Monastic Foundations in Sixth-century Anatolia and Their Role in the Social and Economic Life of the Countryside*, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30/1 (1985) 45–59.

And in those days the servant of God Nicholas journeyed to the shrine of Saint George in Plenion. And the clerics from Plenion came along with their Christ-loving flock, singing litanies and carrying venerable crosses, and met the servant of God at the renowned Saint's [shrine]. And he went along with them from there, along with seven oxen. And they went to the shrine of Saint George, where the servant of God slaughtered the seven oxen. And crowds gathered, so that there were two hundred place settings.<sup>98</sup>

A great feast indispensably followed the sacrifices, to which the saint called all the local population. The celebrations were bountiful and food was usually left over. Such festivities, nothing new, have repeatedly featured the animal sacrifices in other sources. The hagiographer of the *Life of St. Nicholas of Sion* also reinforces the evidence inferred from Augustine's writings that the sacrificial offerings were enacted by Christians at the shrines of the martyrs.

It is particularly manifest in the hagiographical accounts of St. George and St. Nicholas of Sion that the Christianized sacrifices offered to the saint had a charitable rather than expiatory character. Often they were a part of a larger liturgical celebration and sometimes enacted as a fulfillment of a preceding vow. It is noteworthy that the description of sacrificial offerings in the cycle of miracles of St. George shows that the Byzantine custom closely resembled its Italian counterpart connected with the cult of St. Felix, as recounted by Paulinus of Nola.

A motif parallel to the one described by Paulinus of Nola — the animals coming on their own accord to the place of sacrifice<sup>99</sup> — is found in Byzantine hagiography as well. The life of Athenogenes narrates of a mysterious event that happened each year on the feast day of the saint: after the liturgical reading of the Gospels, a doe with its fawn entered the church. The doe, upon offering its fawn to the saint, left the church. Thereafter, the young animal was sacrificed and eaten by the congregation.<sup>100</sup>

(98) *The Life of St. Nicholas of Sion*, 87.

(99) *The Poems of St. Paulinus of Nola*, 167–170.

(100) The miracle is recounted in a Greek version of the *Passion* of the saint, chapters 28 and 40, in P. Maraval, *La passion inédite de S. Athénogène de Pédachthoé en Cappadoce* (BHG 197b) (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1990) (*Studia hagiographica* 75) 58–60, 80. A rather curious fact has been pinpointed by Maraval — the passages containing the descriptions of the sacrifice of the fawn are absent from the Armenian version; *ibid.*, 22, n. 79; 61, n. 64. A shortened version of the hagiographic story is given in the *Synaxarium*: “Λέγεται

The examined material vividly depicts the ritual in action. It shows that that animal sacrifices remained current in the Christian setting of Byzantine communities. Significant, in this respect, is the fact that the sacrificial rituals were often celebrated with active participation of the local clergy.<sup>101</sup> Even if not a part of speculative theology and official ecclesiastical policy, animal sacrifice was a factual part of a popular form of Medieval Christianity. The countryside appears to create the most auspicious conditions for the continuation of sacrifices in a new Christianized form. Indeed, the agricultural milieu, that is believed to have been originally the cradle of sacrifice, remained the favourable environment for its preservation. The rural ethos of small agricultural communities was difficult to reorganize in the process of Christianization. It demanded a different approach, which was indeed found in adapting the old customs for a new religious usage. In the Christian setting they were transformed and given a different meaning: being emptied of their function as sacrificial offerings for sins they regained a new significance of fellowship and thanksgiving sacrifices with a strong emphasis on the charitable aspect of the entire sacrificial ceremony.

*Animal sacrifice and the church dedication:  
Re-evaluation of the Diegesis*

The exposition of the sources that pertain to the phenomenon of animal sacrifices in the Christian context, if anything, can reassure us that the sacrifices of the *Diegesis* were not so outrageous and shocking for the medieval Byzantine audience as they may seem to a modern reader. What is more, one cannot but notice that the animal sacrifices

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δὲ περὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι πρὸ τῆς κατασχέσεως ἀπελθὼν εἰς τὸ μοναστήριον, τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ οὐχ εὗρε, προκατεσχέθησαν γάρ· τὴν δὲ ὑπαντήσασαν αὐτῷ ἔλαφον, ἣν ἀνεθρέψατο ἐν μονῇ, εὐλόγησε καὶ ἐπηύξατο μὴ κυριευθῆναι ὑπὸ τῶν κυνηγετῶν τὸ σπέρμα αὐτῆς, ἀλλὰ καθ' ἕκαστον χρόνον ἄγειν ἐν τῇ μνήμῃ αὐτοῦ αὐτὴν τε καὶ τὰς ἐξ αὐτῆς μελλούσας φύεσθαι μόσχον ἕνα· ὃ καὶ γέγονεν. Ὁρᾶται γὰρ μετὰ τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν τῶν ἀγίων εὐαγγελίων ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ εἰσερχομένη ἡ ἔλαφος καὶ τὸν νεαρὸν αὐτῆς ἀνατιθεῖσα τῷ ἀγίῳ καὶ πάλιν ἐξιούσα· ὃν θύοντες οἱ συνειλεγμένοι εὐχοῦνται εἰς δόξαν τοῦ ἀγίου μάρτυρος καὶ τιμῆν." DELEHAYE, *Synaxarium...*, col. 826, l. 14–27. This particular instance of sacrifice has been considered by F. CUMONT, *L'archevêché de Pédachtoé et le sacrifice du faon*, *Byzantion* 6 (1931) 521–533. Cf. also CUMONT, *St. George and Mithra...*, 66; PALLAS, *La 'Thalassa' dans l'Église Chrétienne...*, 109–110.

(101) Cf. also PALLAS, *La 'Thalassa' dans l'Église Chrétienne...*, 110.

at the feast of *encaenia* of St Sophia have a clear correspondence with various descriptions of the ceremonies of animal sacrifice. Feasting of the poor and giving alms was frequently an integral part of Christianized sacrificial ceremonies. In conformity with the surviving records reviewed above, the sacrificial offerings that were made by Justinian in the description of the *Diegesis* were also distributed to the poor and the needy.

The major correspondence, however, is detected in the association of the animal sacrifices with the particular occasion of the church dedication. A few pivotal pieces of evidence demonstrate a close relationship of Christianised animal sacrifices with the dedication ceremonies of newly built churches. The recommendation to conduct animal sacrifices in connection with church dedications has been already noted above in the discussion of the letter of Gregory the Great to Mellitus. In the Armenian tradition, the offering of *matał* was also enjoined at the dedication of an altar of a newly built church. Additional evidence of such practices in the Eastern Christian liturgy is derived from the following source. This source is the apocryphal canons of St. Thaddeus — a work, which apparently was not concocted before 500, but possibly as late as 700. The Armenian version of the canons was perhaps compiled on the basis of the *Syriac Didascalia*, which appears to have been composed in the first half, even the first decades, of the third century.<sup>102</sup> There is a clear instruction to celebrate the church dedication with the ritual sacrifices following the example of Solomon's dedication of the Temple:

...The apostle said: When the bishop sets up the altar (i.e. in a newly built church) it is proper on the same day to slay victims, bulls and rams and sheep; as Solomon did when he built his temple, and set

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(102) The most recent edition and English translation have been made by A. VÖÖBUS, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, 4 vols. (Louvain: Secretariat du corpus SCO, 1979) (CSCO 401–402; 407–408). The question of dating is discussed in P. GALTIER, La date de la Didascalie des Âpotres, *Revue de l'histoire de religions* 42 (1947) 315ff; R. H. CONNOLLY, *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929) xci. On the nature of the *Syriac Didascalia* see V. C. VAN UNNIK, The Significance of Moses' Law for the Church of Christ According to the Syriac Didascalia, in: *Sparsa Collecta: The Collected Essays of W. C. van Unnik*. Part III (Leiden: Brill, 1983) 8 ff. For the discussion of Jewish-Christian content, see Ch. E. FONROBERT, *The Didascalia Apostolorum: A Mishnah for the Disciples of Jesus*, *J ECS* 9/4 (2001) 483–509.

up the altar; and it was pleasing to God, and the Lord snuffed up the sweet smell.<sup>103</sup>

The pattern of Old Testament dedication looms large in the *Diegesis* as it also does in this passage from the canons of St. Thaddeus. The *topos* of comparison of Christian churches with the Temple of Solomon was rather commonplace.<sup>104</sup> It is no wonder that the ritual of Solomon's celebration of the dedication had an essential impact on the development of Christian rituals of dedication, which might have absorbed Jewish elements. Animal sacrifices must have been considered a too significant part of the glorious ceremony of the dedication conducted by Solomon to be omitted in its corresponding Christian ritual.

Another eloquent witness that the ceremony of the church dedication was to be accompanied by sacrificial offerings in the Christian context comes from a Coptic compilation describing the ecclesiastical office as it was practiced in twelfth-century Egypt. Although the compilation is attributed to Abu Salih the Armenian, it has been proved to have nothing to do either with the Armenian rite in general or Abu Salih in particular.<sup>105</sup> It contains the material of Coptic origin that underwent numerous re-workings, yet can be safely considered as representing the rituals of the Coptic church which, in its turn, must have penetrated into the Coptic liturgy at an earlier stage when there was no confessional division with Byzantium.<sup>106</sup> It is plausible, therefore, that a similar office of church dedication was practiced in the early Byzantine liturgy as well. The office of the church dedication, prescribed by the eleventh-century patriarch of Alexandria Anbâ Sinuthius, runs as follows:

[This patriarch] also established that in the rite of consecration of churches the same customs should be followed as in all the churches of Egypt; and he bade the metropolitan direct the Abyssinians to slay at the completion of the building of a church twelve beasts, namely four oxen, four sheep, and four goats, three at each side of the church,

(103) CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 76–77.

(104) A bright example of the imitation of the Temple is presented in M. E. HELDMAN, Architectural Symbolism, Sacred Geography and the Ethiopian Church, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 22 (1992) 222–241, especially pages 232–235.

(105) U. ZANETTI, Abu l-Makarim et Abu Salih, *Bulletin de la Société d'archéologie copte* 34 (1995) 85–138.

(106) ЛУРЬЕ, Из Иерусалима в Аксум..., 160–161.

and that they should distribute [the flesh] of all [of them] on the day when they ceased from the building of the church, as a gift to God who had helped them to complete a house in which offerings should be made to him and in which his name should be commemorated, and supplications and prayers and praises should be offered.<sup>107</sup>

It is evident that the pattern of immolations prescribed for the dedication of a church according to the given Coptic rite demonstrates close affinity with the abundant animal sacrifices offered at the dedication of St. Sophia. Another common aspect of the two ceremonies, along with the variety of animals immolated, is a charitable distribution of the meat to the people.

The most tangible model of the sacrifices at the *encaenia* of St Sophia, however, can be found in Armenian texts relating to the celebration of the Encaenia in Jerusalem that initially included the celebration of the dedication of the Holy Sepulchre<sup>108</sup> and the discovery of the Holy

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(107) B. T. A. EVETTS (ed. and trans.), A. J. BUTLER (notes), *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighbouring Countries, attributed to Abû Sâlih, the Armenian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895) 291. In the footnote to this text Butler pointed out that this custom of sacrificing animals was probably derived from the Jews and remained in Abyssinia after the conversion of the people to Christianity. He also mentioned other Coptic customs of slaying animals; which generally resemble those discussed above. Thus, a buffalo or sheep was commonly slain and given to the poor when the Copts visited the tombs of relatives during regular celebrations of Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter.

(108) The Holy Sepulchre is a later name for the complex erected by Constantine at the allegedly historical places of Golgotha and the tomb where Christ was buried. In the early sources the two buildings were differentiated: the church of Anastasis, built over Christ's tomb to commemorate it rather as a scene of his resurrection, and the *Martyrium* Basilica, which was a construction incorporating the rock of Calvary. Besides the rotunda and basilica, there was an inner *atrium* where the huge gemmed cross was erected in remembrance of Jesus' crucifixion. The literary and archaeological evidence suggest that the first building at the site was the Basilica. Apparently, it was already at the place when the pilgrim from Bordeaux was passing through Jerusalem in 333: "...a sinistra autem parte est monticulus Golgotha, ubi dominus crucifixus est. Inde quasi ad lapidem missum est cripta, ubi corpus eius positum fuit et tertia die resurrexit; ibidem modo iusso Constantini imperatoris basilica facta est, id est dominicum, mirae pulchritudinis..." (P. GEYER (ed.), *Itinerarium Burdigalense* ([Reprint] New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1964]), 593, l. 4 – 594, l. 5. The Anastasis Rotunda was built a few years later. Yet, as a record in Egeria's diary points out, it was consecrated on the same day as the Basilica: "Item dies enceniarum appellantur quando sancta eccle-

Cross.<sup>109</sup> The first text, which is the *Menologion* entry for the feast of the Encaenia in Jerusalem, September 13,<sup>110</sup> describes the dedication of the Anastasis church in Jerusalem. It recounts the hagiographical version of the dedication: Constantine the Great, his mother Helena and bishop Silvester are told to have celebrated the festival of church dedication over an entire octave sacrificing rams and steers.<sup>111</sup>

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sia, quae in Golgotha est, quam Martyrium uocant, consecrate est a Deo; sed et sancta ecclesia, quae est ad Anastase, id est in eo loco ubi Dominus resurrexit post passionem, ea die et ipsa consecrata est Deo.” (P. MARAVAL (intro., ed. and trans.), *Egeria, Journal de voyage* (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1982) (SC 296) 262. Eusebius, however, reserved the term *martyrium* (μαρτύριον) for the tomb itself. For a fuller analysis of the terminology, see WALKER, 237, 268–269; R. OUSTERHOUT, *The Temple, the Sepulchre, and the Martyrion of the Saviour, Gesta* 29/1 (1990) 44–53, esp. 50–51. For the architectural history of the Holy Sepulchre, see Ch. COÛASNON, *The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974); V. CORBO, *Il Santo Sepolcro di Gerusalemme. Aspetti archeologici dalle origini al periodo crociato* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1981).

(109) It is necessary to stress the significance of Armenian and Georgian sources for the reconstruction of the early phase of the Byzantine liturgy. Thus, the liturgy of the Encaenia is fairly well reconstructed on the basis of surviving Armenian and Georgian lectionaries (M. Tarchnischvili (trans.), *Le Grand Lectionnaire de l'Église de Jérusalem (V<sup>e</sup>–VII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, vol. 2 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1960) (CSCO 205, SI 14) 36–40; A. RENOUX, *Le codex Arménien Jérusalem 121. Edition comparée du texte et de deux autres manuscrits* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971) (PO 36/2), 361–363. A valuable eye-witness account of the Encaenia festival in Jerusalem comes from the pen of a pilgrim from Gaul Egeria. She mentions that the Encaenia commemorated both the church dedication and the discovery of the Cross (ch. 48.1–2): “Harum ergo ecclesiarum sanctarum encenia cum summo honore celebrantur, quoniam crux Domini inuenta est ipsa die” (Egeria, *Journal de voyage*, 262–264). The English translation and commentary on Egeria’s diary was made by J. WILKINSON, *Egeria’s Travels to the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Ariel Publishing House, Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1981). The early history of the Encaenia and the imperial ideology behind it have been studied by M. A. FRASER, *The Feast of the Encaenia in the Fourth Century and in the Ancient Liturgical Sources of Jerusalem* (PhD Thesis, University of Durham, 1995); IDEM, *Constantine and the Encaenia, Studia Patristica* 39 (1997) 25–28.

(110) Cf. Manuscripts of the Bodleian Library in Oxford *Marsh* 438, ff. 46v–48r and *Arm. c.* 3, ff. 53v–55r. The text remains unedited and largely unknown to the wide public.

(111) CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum...*, 76, n.a.

Another text, known as a rather serious historical source, is an excerpt from the Armenian “History of Heraclius” ascribed to Sebeos.<sup>112</sup> It describes the restoration of the Holy Cross to Constantinople by the Emperor Heraclius. Although there is no clear-cut reference to ritual sacrificing, the oxen mentioned in this context could hardly be meant for anything else but sacrificial purposes:

Then the next day they held another service in the great cathedral which was called Aya Sophia and they celebrated the feast of the Holy Cross, which was the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month September, with plenty of oxen, sweet-smelling incense and shining luminaries, for they decided to celebrate the feast of the Holy Cross during eight days.<sup>113</sup>

The ceremony of the restoration of the Holy Cross, as the story goes, was celebrated in Constantinople on September 14 following the celebration of “the great day of the dedications on September 13.”<sup>114</sup> Since the two feasts originated from essentially the same festival,<sup>115</sup> we can conclude that they reflect a common tradition. Significantly, both the commemoration entry in the Armenian *Menologion* and the passage from the “History of Heraclius” by Sebeos are unanimous in describing the two feasts constituting the Encaenia as being celebrated with animal offerings. The evidence derived from these sources strongly suggests that animal sacrifice was a vital element in the Early Byzantine liturgy of the Encaenia.

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(112) J.-P. MAHÉ, Critical Remarks on the Newly Edited excerpts from Sebēos, in: Th. J. SAMUELIAN, M. E. STONE (eds.), *Medieval Armenian Culture* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984) 218–239.

(113) MAHÉ, Critical Remarks..., 232.

(114) Ibid.

(115) Although initially the festival of the Encaenia included the celebration of the church dedications (Anastasis and Martyrion) and the feast of the Cross, with time the celebration of the Cross became a dominant element and totally eclipsed the dedication part. The feast of the Cross, in its turn, was modified with additional elements — if at the beginning it was the commemoration of the discovery of the True Cross by Helena, later it received a new layer of meaning with the “recovery of the Cross” motif, which celebrated the restoration of the Cross by the emperor Heraclius. For the development of the feast of the Cross, see L. VAN TONGEREN, *Exaltation of the Cross: Towards the Origins of the Feast of the Cross and the Meaning of the Cross in Early Medieval Liturgy* (Leuven—Paris—Sterling, VG: Peeters, 2000).

The similarity between the two *encaenia* that were celebrated with ritual sacrificial ceremonies — the Encaenia of the Holy Sepulchre and the dedication of the Great Church of St. Sophia — is difficult to consider a mere accident. It suggests the familiarity with the “Encaenia of the Holy Sepulchre” tradition transmitted in the Armenian sources and, quite likely, its conscious imitation in the *Diegesis*. In fact, there were some deeper ideological reasons for such a deliberate mimesis. The church of the Holy Sepulchre was construed from the very beginning as the New Jerusalem or the New Temple.<sup>116</sup> The same high status was later advocated for Constantinople and the church of St Sophia which assumed the role of the major religious shrine and focus of pilgrimage.<sup>117</sup> The construction of the image of St. Sophia as the New Temple necessitated its representation as superseding not only the Temple of Solomon, but also the Holy Sepulchre, for the topmost status of the latter had been already established by various means.<sup>118</sup> The author of the *Diegesis* had to tackle the dual ancestry and was bound to promote St. Sophia as excelling both its rivals: the Temple of Solomon and the Holy Sepulchre.<sup>119</sup> To attain this goal, the author had at his dis-

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(116) Thus, already Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Vita Constantini* claimed the status of New Jerusalem for the Holy Sepulchre in F. WINKELMANN, *Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantins* ([Reprint] Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1991) (GSC Eusebius, I/I), III, 33.1–2.

(117) B. FLUSIN, Construire une nouvelle Jérusalem: Constantinople et les reliques, in: M. A. AMIZ-MOEZZI, J. SCHEID (eds.), *L’orient dans l’histoire religieuse de l’Europe. L’invention des origines* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000) 51–70; B. BITTON-ASHKELONY, *Encountering the Sacred. The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 201–206; cf. *Vie de s. Daniel le Stylite*, in: H. DELEHAYE (ed.), *Les saints stylites* (Brussels: Société de Bollandistes, 1923) 12.

(118) The “Temple-Holy Sepulchre” imagery is discussed by J. SCHWARTZ, *The Encaenia of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Temple of Solomon and the Jews*, *Theologische Zeitschrift* 43 (1987) 265–281.

(119) The church of St. Sophia is likened to both the Temple and the Holy Sepulchre already in the sixth century hymn of Romanos the Melodist. The achievements of the imperial pair who founded the church are plainly declared as surpassing the accomplishments of all the previous emperors. The church, it is implied, excelled the preceding foundations as well. *On Earthquakes and Fires*, 22–23, in: J. GROSDIDIER DE MATONS (ed.), *Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes*, vol. 5 (Paris: Cerf, 1981) (SC 283), 494–496. English translation of the hymn can be found in R. J. SCHORK, *Sacred Songs from the Byzantine Pulpit: Romanos the Melodist* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995) 184–195.

posal methods of literary imitation and symbolic appropriation of the Temple widely employed in various religious compositions.<sup>120</sup>

Conscious appropriation and transfer of the motif of sacrificing at the *Encaenia* in Jerusalem, like the Old Testament description of the sacrifices at the dedication ceremony of the Temple, into the *Diegesis* of St. Sophia was a technique to ascribe the equal or even superior importance to the Great Church of Constantinople. Animal sacrifices must have been viewed as a crucial element of the ceremony that would add weight to establishment of the image of St. Sophia as *The Temple* and assert its pre-eminence.

As a conclusion to what has been said above, I want to propose an alternative solution to the puzzle of the animal sacrifices in the *Diegesis*, which is contrary to both the complete negation of the phenomenon and the allegation of the historicity of the description. It is possible to assume that the author and the audience of the *Diegesis* were aware of Christian rituals of animal sacrifice which were observed either in earlier times or by some contemporary Christian communities, more likely in peripheral regions of the Empire. Possibly, the curious passage from the *Diegesis* reflects the “popular memory” or current perception of how the ceremony must have happened: it was naturally expected that the *encaenia* of such a great shrine as St Sophia had also a very special and distinct celebration. The medieval author, who almost doubtless was acquainted with the narrative tradition, literary or oral, of the greatest (for Byzantine Christians) dedications of the Temple and the Holy Sepulchre that were necessarily accompanied by sacrificial ritual, could not but imagine the *encaenia* of St. Sophia conducted in a similar way. Thus, I suggest that the description of lavish animal sacrifices upon the initiative of the emperor was deliberately introduced into the canvas of the narrative, following the tradition recounting the major *encaenia*, as a popular theme that was accorded extraordinary significance. The plot with the enactment of sacrifices was intended as a powerful means for enhancing the eminent status of its imperial founder and for securing a special prestige for the topmost event of the dedication of St. Sofia, the prominence of which would also be imparted to the church dedicated.

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(120) More on the subject of *translatio Templi*, although in the Ethiopian context, can be found in the article of ЛУРЬЕ, Из Иерусалима в Аксум... See also M. E. HELDMAN, Architectural Symbolism, Sacred Geography and the Ethiopian Church, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 22 (1992) 222–241, especially pages 235–237.

### *Addenda*

A couple of scholarly studies dealing with the topic covered in this article were brought to my attention after the paper was completed and submitted for publication. The most relevant to my own enquiry is the article of N. D. ВАРАВАНОВ, «Благочестивые заклания. Традиции публичных жертвоприношений в византийском приходском православии [Pious Immolations. Traditions of public sacrifices in the Byzantine parish piety]», *Византийский Временник* 63 (2004) 89–113. N. D. Barabanov examines a number of textual data pertinent to the issue of animal sacrifice in Byzantium as a phenomenon of popular religion that, because of being rather profitable for the Byzantine clergy, was leniently tolerated and even practiced by the priests circumventing official regulations of the Byzantine church.

The second work is the book by M.-Z. ПЕТРОПОУЛОУ, *Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Greek Religion, Judaism, and Christianity, 100 BC to AD 200* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). This just-out-of-print fundamental monograph on animal sacrifice in Greek, Jewish and early Christian religions is only of marginal importance for the present study. It treats material much earlier than the scope of the present article that essentially focuses on Late Antique and Medieval periods. Yet, it could be consulted as a useful resource on the practice and attitudes towards animal sacrifice in the pagan and Jewish contexts — the milieu where Christianity first emerged. Treating the issue of animal sacrifice as viewed by early Christians in the period before the Temple destruction (AD 70) and, then in the span between AD 70 and AD 200, M.-Z. Petropoulou arrives at some interesting conclusions. She considers that there indeed could be some groups of Christians in the pre-AD 70 period that continued to practice the Jewish cultic rites, which necessarily involved the ritual slaying of animals. Such sacrificial practices, as the reviewed evidence testifies, were entirely rejected by the Christians in the second century. Having completed her exhaustive study of animal sacrifice in the defined chronological framework, the author, quite justifiably, does not protrude her inquiry any further. The only reference to Late Antique sacrifice offered to Christian martyrs and the sacrificial feasts held in honor of local saints is found on page 263 and note 137, which is repeated later on page 294 and note 10. The history of animal sacrifice in the Late Antiquity and Middle Ages, therefore, still remains to be written.

On this occasion, I would like to express my gratitude to B. Lourié and N. D. Barabanov for making this additional material known and

available to me. I am also thankful to B. Lourié and my supervisor P. Van Deun for helpful comments and suggestions made in the process of my work on this article.

### SUMMARY

The article proposes a plausible explanation for the Christianized ritual of animal sacrifice enacted at a ceremony of church dedication as described in the Byzantine legend of the building of St. Sophia in Constantinople. In order to provide a relevant context for such a reconstruction of models and sources that might have inspired the anonymous author to incorporate this curious motif into his account, considerable attention has been devoted to a re-appraisal of the problem of animal sacrifice within the system of Late Antique and Medieval liturgical practices. For that reason, a detailed overview of the source material pertaining to Medieval Latin, Armenian and Byzantine traditions has been given. The account of the celebration of the *encaenia* of St. Sophia, which described lavish animal immolations conducted by the emperor Justinian, has been re-examined in the light of surviving evidence. The conclusion reached in the process of the present study suggests that the theme of animal sacrifice was not that alien and bizarre to the Byzantine audience as it had been thus far believed, and that this motif must have played a significant role in presenting the church of St. Sophia as equal to, or rather surpassing previous great religious foundations — the Jerusalem Temple and the Holy Sepulchre — and securing special prestige to its imperial founder, Justinian the Great.