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## **Muhammad and the Formation of Sacrifice**

# Chapter 1

## Sacrifice in Islam?

A festival of sacrifice, *ʿīd al-aḍḥā*, takes up a prominent position in Islam, celebrated annually in the month of pilgrimage, *dhū l-ḥijja*. At the same time as the *ḥajj* and the sacrificial ritual take place in Mecca, sheep, goats, camels and cows are slaughtered all over the Muslim world. The performance of this sacrificial ritual in a religion that regards God as totally omnipotent and in no need of offerings, gives cause to many questions, some of which will be discussed in this study.

There are many possibilities for anyone who intends to study sacrifice in Islam. My approach has been delimited by a chosen theme (the formation of sacrificial rituals in early Islam), a certain body of texts (the Qurʾān and some early Muslim writers), and a clearly defined analytical perspective (ritual theory as it has been formulated by Roy A. Rappaport). On the following pages, I will introduce my points of departure: the theme, the texts, and the perspective.

I would like to begin by presenting some of the questions related to the development of the *ʿumra*, the *ḥajj* (including the Farewell-*ḥajj* of Muḥammad some months before he died in 10/632), and *ʿīd al-aḍḥā* that I will pose, and try to answer, in this study. First, does the Islamic offering really contain a *sacrifice* in the sense the concept is usually used in the history of religions, like Widengren defines it, for example?

As a sacrifice one designates the religious act, the ritual, which through the consecration of a living creature or a species of plant, or a liquid substance or an object to a deity – in case of a living creature, with or without killing – establishes a connection between this deity and the person who performs the ritual. It is thereby assumed that the ritual is able to influence the deity in a way hoped for by the sacrificer.<sup>1</sup>

Alternatively, are the aspects of *fellowship* among the believers, *loyalty* towards Muḥammad's example and the idea of *charity* the essential base and goals?

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1 My translation; German: "Unter einem Opfer versteht man die religiöse Handlung, den Ritus, der durch die Weihung eines lebenden Wesens, einer Pflanzenart, einer Flüssigkeit oder eines Gegenstandes an eine Gottheit – wenn es sich um ein lebendes Wesen handelt, mit oder ohne Tötung – eine Verbindung schafft zwischen dieser Gottheit und dem Menschen, der den Ritus ausführt, von welchem man annimmt, daß er die Gottheit in einer vom Opfernden gewünschten Richtung beeinflussen kann" (Widengren 1969: 280).

What *reasons* are there for obeying Allāh through sacrificial rituals similar to those Muḥammad performed during his first and only *hajj* in Islamic times? Further, *why* does a sacrificial ritual take place in Islam at all? *How* important is this sacrificial part of the pilgrimage ritual, which is to be undertaken to fulfil the *ihrām*-status of the Muslim? What *obstacles* might affect or even hinder the practice of sacrifice? Why is a sacrifice *required* in the Islamic ritual when a *bloody* sacrifice seems to have no ability to change God and his actions? Does early Islam see the sacrifice as something *more* than an *isolated ritual slaughtering*? Has the sacrificial ritual become an *empty* ritual or is it a ritual that expresses something *else*, for instance, something different from a regular slaughtering in Allāh's name?

How did the *pre-Islamic* sacrifices that were undertaken in Mecca and Mina, influence the idea of the Islamic sacrifice during *hajj* and *ʿīd al-aḍḥā*? Why is *any* ritually clean animal a *valid* victim in the feast's sacrificial ritual when Allāh found a *ram* for Ibrāhīm's son in the first place? What is Muḥammad's role in this and the later sacrificial act during *hajj*? Is his life to be compared to Ibrāhīm's life – or to Ibrāhīm's *son's* life? Is there an idea of a sacrificial *prototype* behind the immolation and the rituals connected to it?

My assumption is that the early Islamic sacrifice<sup>2</sup> is related to the complexity of *hajj* and its model narratives – where the biography of Muḥammad and his family and friends is immensely important. These texts and narratives are developed through the rituals (*ʿibadāt*) and through the regulations (*manāsik*) for the pilgrimage and the sacrificial rituals in Mecca and Mina, but also more and more in connection with the rituals of *ʿīd al-aḍḥā* all over the Muslim world.

In early Islamic literature, there are several narratives and smaller texts, which tell about sacrificial rituals or comment on sacrificial matters. The story about Ibrāhīm almost sacrificing his son (Qurʾān 37) and the attributed interpretations, which during the early years of Islam were divided on the question whether Iṣḥāq or Ismāʿīl was the intended sacrifice, are significant.

Another sacrifice to which I refer, is found in the narrative of the Prophet Muḥammad's father, ʿAbd Allāh, who was nearly sacrificed by his father ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hishām. Admittedly of less significance than Ibrāhīm's sacrifice, it is still important for the later evaluation of Muḥammad's status. But it is

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2 I have chosen to use the term “Islamic sacrifice” and not the more extensive “Arabic sacrifice” that Chelhod (1955) uses already in the title, *Le sacrifice chez les arabes*, of his book. Even if I draw examples from pre-Islamic sacrifices, they are described by Muslims in an Islamic context. The majority of examples Chelhod brings are *Islamic*, and he emphasises that “libations” and “funeral traditions” among “the Arabs” are “Arabic sacrifices” and not solely “Islamic” (Chelhod 1955: 140–143).

relevant to ask *why* the symbolic narrative of the near sacrifice of Muḥammad's father is seldom taken into consideration regarding the *ḥajj* and *ʿid al-adḥā* even though it has many similarities with the Abrahamic sacrifice.

Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) is – as far as I know – the oldest source<sup>3</sup> for the following sentence addressed to Muḥammad, “O son of the two sacrifices (*yā ibn al-dhabīḥayni*)!”<sup>4</sup> Later, al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) takes up the same idea and says, “The Prophet is glorious, peace be upon him, and he said: ‘I am the son of the two sacrifices (*anā ibnu l-dhabīḥayni*)’.”<sup>5</sup> In the late 19th century, the often quoted historian, al-Ālūsī, refers that Muḥammad said about himself, “I am the son of the two sacrifices (*anā ibnu al-dhabīḥayni*).”<sup>6</sup> Most often these two sacrifices seem to be understood as the near sacrifices of Ibrāhīm and ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. Consequently, I want to examine these narratives that are found in different early Islamic sources.

Additionally, other texts that interact with these texts, either thematically or symbolically, will be considered. The Qurʾān (*suwar* 2, 22, 108 and more) will contribute to the understanding of the two sacrifices and the sacrificial activity during *ʿid al-adḥā*.<sup>7</sup> One last relevant question linked to these sacrifices is what sort of *sanctity*, *hierarchy* and understanding of *time* is defined in these sacrificial rituals. Here, the sources are in addition to those mentioned above, al-Wāqidi's (d. 207/822) important work about the challenger Muḥammad.<sup>8</sup> This study aims at answering these and other questions, and these answers will hopefully enlighten my main subject of inquiry: Is there *one ultimate concern* behind the two sacrifices?

Moreover, Islamic texts from the five first centuries AH will be subjects of my investigation, in particular the above mentioned narratives from al-Ṭabarī's *History of the Messengers and the Kings* from the beginning of the 10th century AD, but also other texts, for instance by the early *ḥadīth* collector and jurist

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3 Rubin (1990: 105) points to an early source al-Azraqī, *Akḥbar Makka*. However, the last Arabic edition that Wüstenfeld uses for his edition (1861) is from the transmitter Abū Ḥassan Muḥammad ibn Nūfīʿ al-Khuẓāʿī who died *after* 350/961 according to Fück (1960: 826–827). Hence, al-Ṭabarī is earlier even if they partly use the same sources.

4 Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) 1987 vol. 2: 83 [Arabic vol. 1: 291].

5 Al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), Jolivet and Monnot 1993: 506: “Je suis le fils des deux victimes sacrificielles”. Cf. Badrān Arabic: 1240; Kaylānī: 239.

6 Al-Ālūsī (d. 1924) 1896 (1883?): vol. 3: 46–49. S.P. Stetkevych (1993: 38) only mentions the al-Ālūsī-source when she refers to the saying of the Prophet.

7 Even if the *ʿid* is never mentioned in the Qurʾān.

8 Al-Wāqidi (d. 207/822) 1966. Cf. Leder 2002: 102–103. *The Life of Muḥammad: Al-Wāqidi's Kitāb al-Maghāzī*. 2011. Rizwi F. Faizer (ed.) Translated by R.F. Faizer, Amal Ismail and AbdulKader Tayob. Milton Park / New York: Routledge.

Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795),<sup>9</sup> the historian al-Yaʿqūbī (d. ca. 293/905),<sup>10</sup> and the historian Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 206/821) with his exciting text about pre-Islam, *The Book of the Idols*.<sup>11</sup> The literature in the genre of the Histories of the Prophets (*Qiṣāṣ al-anbiyāʾ*)<sup>12</sup> put down in writing in the 10th and 11th centuries AD is also interesting regarding the development of the reception of the tradition of the sacrificial rituals. In a few cases Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198),<sup>13</sup> Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373),<sup>14</sup> and others are consulted to see whether the views of Mālik ibn Anas in particular, are still taken into consideration in the 6th/14th Century. All this literature will contribute to a new comprehension of the formation of sacrifice in early Islam.

This work is based on studies of Arabic texts and the application of ritual and sacrificial theories, especially with the help of some major analytical concepts found in the monograph *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* by the late Roy A. Rappaport.<sup>15</sup> During the 20th century, the research on ritual and sacrifice has looked upon the sacrificial rituals within the Abrahamic and other religions in different ways. Recent contributions (e.g. J. Drexler, B. Gladigow and H. Seiwert) are especially pointing at the *complexity* of sacrificial rituals. Rappaport goes even further and combines anthropological and religious ritual theories into a meaningful whole, which will be used to illuminate the Muslim sacrificial praxis as found in early Islamic writings.

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9 Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795) 1951.

10 Al-Yaʿqūbī (d. ca 293/905) 1960.

11 Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 206/821) (1914 and 1924) 1965 and 1952.

12 Al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035) 1991 and al-Kisāʾī (3rd–4th/10th century) 1922 and 1978.

13 Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) (1994 and 1996) 2000.

14 Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) 1996.

15 Rappaport 1999.