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Animal Sacrificial Rituals in pre-Roman Southern Italy: Dog Sacrifices in Vaste

ABSTRACT. The following paper focuses on the results of the archaeological research carried out by the University of Salento in Vaste (Southern Apulia). In the very centre of this ancient settlement, a holy place was set up between the 4th and 3rd centuries BC: three cavities contained the remains of rituals involving the sacrifice of domestic animals with subsequent slaughter, cooking, and collective banquets. Even five dogs were sacrificed, although they were neither slaughtered nor consumed. Ancient authors report that bloody dog rituals were associated with the different aspects of religious behaviour based on the particular value attributed to this animal; this value was often ambiguous, since the dog was associated with many gods and considered impure and unclean. It is possible to identify the use of this rite in several contexts of the Italian peninsula between the Iron Age and Romanization, in which similar acts were clearly distinguished in the stratigraphy and interpreted as "abandonment" or "closing rituals": the remains of the dogs lay above the layers of votive deposits or in contact with the destruction and abandonment layers. An analysis of the ritual and an explanation of its diffusion, together with an exegesis of the literary sources, can be framed in a research perspective that includes the anthropology of the ritual. It emerges that human alimentary behaviours, even prohibitions in the case of dogs, provide a key to understanding the ritual attitude towards animals; these behaviours are inscribed in the relationship of perpetual tension between the feelings of affinity and distinction, between human society and animal species.

KEYWORDS: Italy, pre-roman, sacrifice, dog, meal, purification, Thailand, trick

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Ритуальные жертвоприношения животных в доримской Южной Италии: жертвоприношения собак в Васте

АННОТАЦИЯ. Данная работа сфокусирована на результатах археологических исследований, проведенных в Васте (Южная Апулия) Салентийским университетом. В центре расположенного здесь древнего поселения, датированного IV–III вв. до н. э., обнаружены три ямы, содержащие останки, свидетельствующие о совершении ритуальных жертвоприношений домашних животных (с забоем животных, последующим приготовлением пищи и коллективным пиршеством). Здесь обнаружены также останки пяти собак, которые были принесены в жертву, но при этом не были ни забиты, ни съедены. Древние авторы сообщают, что кровавые ритуалы с собаками были связаны с различными аспектами религиозных верований, основанных на идее особой ценности, приписываемой этому животному: эта ценность неоднозначна, поскольку собака ассоциировалась со множеством божеств и считалась нечистой и грязной. Подобный обряд был зафиксирован на территории Апеннинского полуострова в период между железным веком и романизацией. По данным стратиграфии, именно в этот период четко прослеживается распространение данного ритуала, интерпретировать его можно как «завершение» или «заключительный ритуал»: собачьи останки залегают над слоями вотивных приношений или рядом с разрушенными слоями. Анализ ритуала, объяснение его распространения совместно с толкованием письменных свидетельств о нем можно рассматривать как исследовательскую перспективу, включающую антропологию ритуала. Пищевое поведение людей, в данном случае запреты, касающиеся собак, дает ключ к пониманию ритуалов с животными; это поведение связано с постоянным напряжением в отношении сходства и различия между человеческим обществом и животным миром.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: Италия, доримская, жертвоприношения, собака, еда, очищение, Таиланд, хитрость

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THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the 4th and 3rd century BC, Southern Apulia, the Heel of Italy, became the settlement of a particular breed of indigenous people, to which the ancient Greek authors attributed the named Messapioi. From the beginning of the colonization of Magna Grecia (the so-called pre-colonization, 9th century BC), the Salento peninsula was a central hub of the navigation routes towards the West, so that Greeks and Messapians engaged in close commercial and cultural exchanges.

In the late Classic and Hellenistic ages, the territory was organized in a cantonal system because of a considerable demographic increase (fig. 1). Almost every settlement was surrounded by city walls made of orthostats, and some of them exceeded 100 hectares in extension, even if the whole surface was not completely inhabited. In fact, each settlement contained necropolises, workshops, and places of cults. The bigger cities played the role of capitals; the smaller towns and the minor sites were linked with them.

Vaste was located near the dominant settlement of Muro Leccese, within a district including Otranto and Castro on the Ionic-Adriatic coast and many sites on the hilly ridge named Serra di Poggiardo, like the tower near Giuggianello (Mastronuzzi 2018; Semeraro 2020: 19–31).

Vaste's fortifications were ca. 3.000 meters long and enclosed ca. 78 hectares; the central nucleus of the settlement was surrounded by inner city walls and contained houses, as well as at least communal buildings and a sanctuary (fig. 2).

VASTE'S SANCTUARY

The sacred area has been brought to light in Dante Square, the place at the highest altitude. The principal period in which it was inhabited dates back to the 3rd century BC, although some layers indicate pre-existing phases of the Iron Age (8th–7th century BC) and of the Archaic Age (the second half of the 6th — the first half of the 5th century BC). The sanctuary includes a large building consisting of two adjacent precincts, one of which is equipped with hearths (fig. 3). In front of the precincts a wide open area comprises three large pits dug in the bedrock (Mastronuzzi, Ciuchini 2011) (fig. 4).

These pits are hypogeal rooms with circular or elliptical openings, equipped with blocks and slabs in local stone. At the opening of Pit 2, letter-like signs are engraved; they appear to be isolated or composed in short sequences; there is also a swastika. The pits probably have karstic origins and were created by enlarging natural fissures, which suggested the possibility of a direct contact with the underground world and the underground gods (fig. 5).

Pit 3 is the largest one; it is ca. 3 meters wide and 3 meters deep. At its bottom and connected to a minor fissure, there is a slab with a central hole,

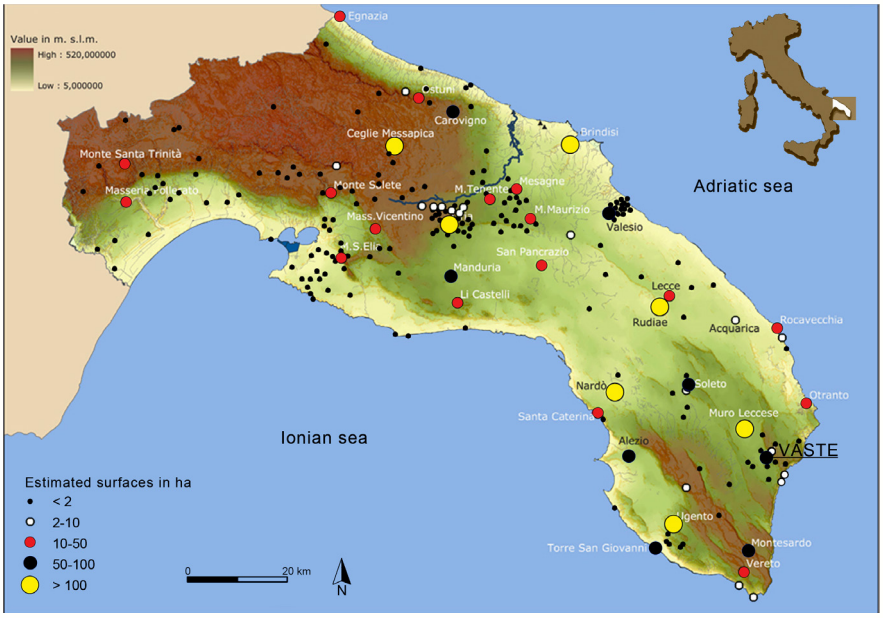

Fig. 1. Settlements of the Hellenistic period in Southern Apulia. [DTM rework after Web-GIS]. University of Salento: Laboratory of ICT for Archeology, 2022

Fig. 2. Map of the Vaste in the 4th–3rd century BC. University of Salento: Laboratory of Classical Archaeology, 2022

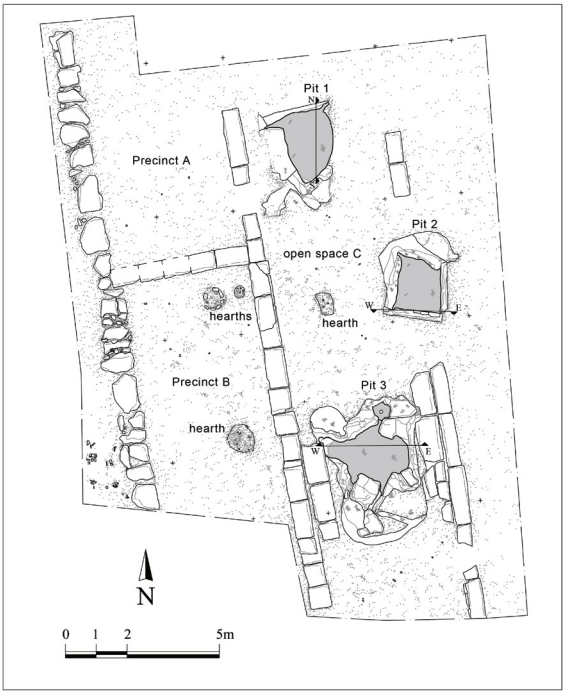

Fig. 3. Map of the of the sanctuary in the centre of Vaste. University of Salento: Laboratory of Classical Archaeology, 2022

Fig. 4. Reconstruction of the sanctuary. University of Salento: idea Francesco D'Andria, drawing InkLink — Firenze, 2004

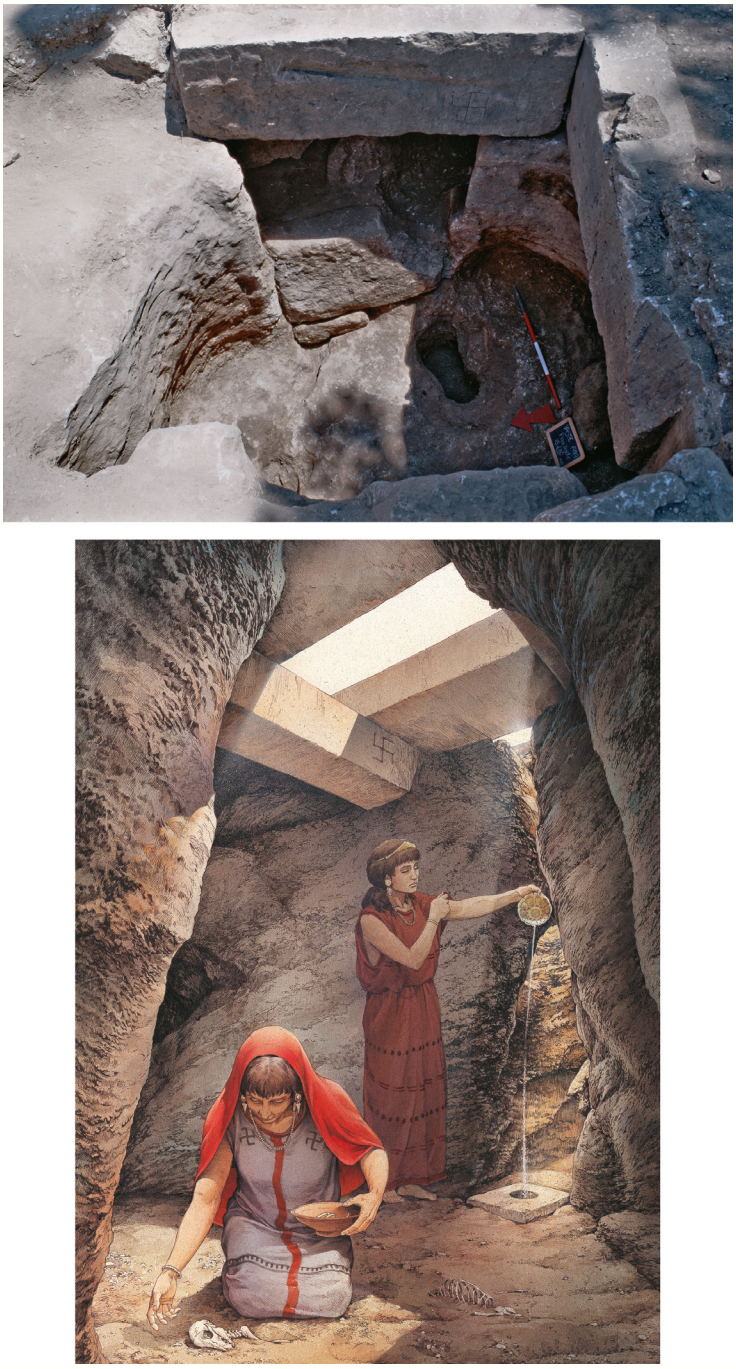

Fig. 5. A) Mouth of Pit 2. Laboratory of Classical Archaeology — Archive. Photo by G. Mastronuzzi, 1999. B) Scene of cult in Pit 3. University of Salento: idea Francesco D'Andria, drawing InkLink — Firenze, 2004

which may be considered an altar. The large dimensions of the hypogeum suggest that it was periodically used for religious performances.

In Pit 1, the stratigraphic excavation has revealed many votive deposits in a secondary location (Mastronuzzi 2005). They contain pottery and other artefacts of the first half of the 3rd century BC, which were relocated in the consequence of cleaning and reorganizing the holy place during the second half of the same century (fig. 6). Presumably, the votive deposits were first set in or near the precincts as a collection of furniture, artefacts, and eco-facts used during the ceremonies. Afterwards, in the final years of the 3rd or in the first years of the 2nd century BC, the sanctuary was definitely abandoned; some layers witness to this event, but it is especially testified to by the presence of a hearth, in which a large symbolic wooden object was burnt (Mastronuzzi 2013; Mastronuzzi et al. 2013).

The votive deposits contain pottery related to sacred meals, as well as charcoals and faunal remains (Mastronuzzi, Ciuchini 2011: 685–689). The latter mostly pertain to domestic animals (93 %) and many bones show traces of slaughter (De Grossi Mazzorin, Solinas 2010: 185–186). Sheep, goats, and pigs prevail, which is normal, as these were the most common offerings, while cattle, as rare and noble victims, are fewer. Even fewer are chickens and wild animals. The archaeozoological evidence refers to the feeding sacrifices, named thysia by the Greeks; besides, the data from Vaste can be easily compared with those from other Messapian cultic and ritual contexts (De Grossi Mazzorin, Minniti 2016).

What is remarkable is the presence of the remains of five dogs (Coppola 2005), which is completely unusual if compared with the elements of the ordinary sacrificial feeding ritual, normally related to cattle, sheep, and pigs. Furthermore, even other characteristics distinguish this scenario from others: the absence of cutting, slaughtering, and burning traces, the presence of almost entire bodies and, finally, the fact that the dogs' bones account for more than one third of the entire faunal sample of Pit 1. A large number of dog bones comes from the lower levels, below the votive deposits, at the bottom of the cavity (US 164), and these remains belong to one animal. The bones of the other four dogs were in the upper deposits (US 146, 147, 149) and in the abandonment layers (US 140, 145, 148).

A thorough reading of the stratigraphic sequence can lead to a tentative reconstruction of some events that took place in the Vaste's sanctuary during the 3rd century BC. The remains of sacred meals and the ceremonial equipment, previously set out in other places of the holy cult, were moved and carefully deposited in Pit 1, but not before the performance of a ritual act. This act consisted in killing a dog. Finally, the depositions were sealed as a result of a further ritual involving four more animals. The absolute date of these rituals is around 250 BC.

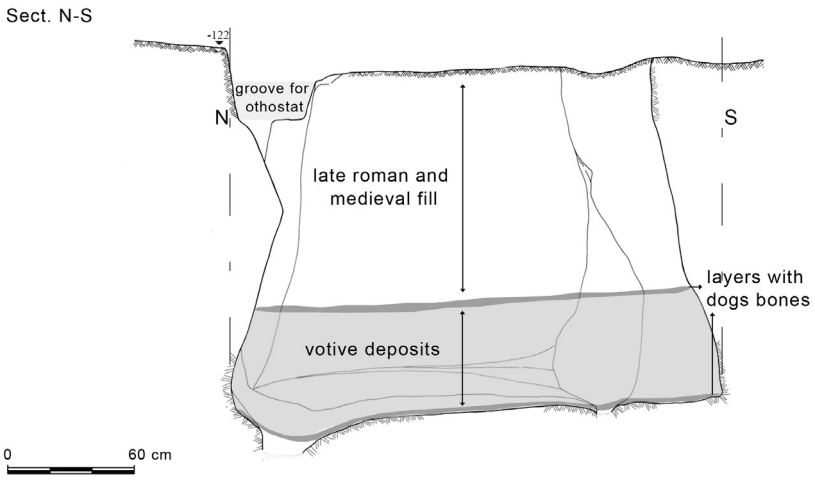

Fig. 6. A) View of Pit 1. Laboratory of Classical Archaeology — Archive. Photo by G. Mastronuzzi, 1999. B) Reconstructive section of the stratigraphic sequence in Pit 1. University of Salento: Laboratory of Classical Archaeology, 2022

DOG SACRIFICES IN PRE-ROMAN ITALY: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA

Even in other Italic contexts of the same historical period, it is possible to recognise similar sequences of actions, including a preparatory and a final rite, which reflect the opening and the closing of the rite (Cerchiai 2008: 24–25). Dogs sacrifice and burial, or even interment of portions of them, are just parts of complex mechanisms connected with the dismantling of sacred sites or with the defunctionalisation of sectors of them. For the Hellenistic period, this is well proven in Torre di Satriano — Lucania (Osanna 2004: 53–54), in Pyrgi, the ancient harbour of the Etruscan city of Caere (Caloi, Palombo 1980; Colonna 1992: 18), Narce (Belelli Marchesini, Michetti 2017: 479), Rome, near the temple of Vesta (Gianferrari 1995: 137), and in the so-called Palici's sanctuary — Palikè in Sicily (Maniscalco 2018: 75, 167, 310–312); at Egnazia the deposition of a penic bone has recently been recognised (Mastrocinque 2022: 18). Some findings at Veio (De Grossi Mazzorin, Cucinotta 2009) and in the whole region of Etruria are more problematic, even though it seems possible to detect there a specific connection between the dog sacrifices and the dismantling of hydraulic works over a long chronological period from the 7th century BC to the late Hellenistic period (Belelli Marchesini, Michetti 2017).

Dog remains are known even in other Greek and Italic sanctuaries of the 4th–3rd century BC, like Demeter's sanctuary at Morgantina (Greco et al. 2021: 214), the Sele Heraion near Paestum (Ferrara 2009: 178), the sanctuary near the Paestum agora (D'Ambrosio, De Bonis 2000), the so-called U stoa in Locri (Torelli 1977: 149), the so-called Eolos' bothros in Lipari (Villari 1991), Malophoros' sanctuary in Selinunte (Greco et al. 2021: 162–163), the Scala Portazza sanctuary in Lentini in Sicily (Scavone 2020: 99–100), the St. Anna sanctuary of Akragas (Miccichè 2020: 256), the sanctuary in Lavello (Tagliente et al. 1991), Aphrodite's sanctuary in Gravisca (Sorrentino 2004: 178), Borgo Le Ferriere in Satricum (Prummel 1996), a votive deposit in the area of the Asolo's theatre (Gambacurta 2000: 58). In Etruria, dogs are also known in Volterra (Bonamici 2005: 7) and Ortaglia (Bruni 2005). Sometimes dog remains show cut marks, as in the sanctuary near the agora of Heracle (Wilkens 2002: 133) and in Piazza Duomo in Siracusa (Chilardi 2006). Five slaughtered dogs have been found in the sanctuary near the necropolis of Cannicella in Orvieto (Stopponi 2008).

During the archaic period (6th–5th century BC), the use of dogs in rituals was practiced in Rome near the temples of Mater Matuta (Tagliacozzo 1989), near the Meta Sudans (De Grossi Mazzorin 2008: 78) and near the Lapis Niger (De Grossi Mazzorin 1990). Moreover, some foundation pits with dogs depositions in Veio may go back to the 8th century BC (De Grossi Mazzorin, Cucinotta 2009: 130; Fiore et al. 2015).

Mostly, this evidence has been referred to purification rites, connected with the cults of female goddesses and with liminal situations, such as passages from outside to inside and vice versa, or from the earthly world of living people to the underground of chthonic deities and/or to the heavens with Olympic gods (Cusumano 2004; Di Giuseppe 2005: 270–272; De Grossi Mazzorin 2008; Stopponi 2008).

More rarely, dogs' depositions have been recognised as possible remains of abandonment rites in domestic buildings, for instance, in Soleto (Van Compernolle 2012: 77), Pyrgi (Baglione, Belelli Marchesini 2015), and in Alto Adige, near Bolzano (Pisoni, Tecchiati 2010). Another kind of dog sacrifices, widespread from the 9th–8th to the 2nd–1st centuries BC, is connected with foundation rites, especially the construction of city walls and gates (Di Giuseppe 2005: 263–264; Di Giuseppe 2017: 562–564), but also with building important residential complexes, such as the "tower-house" in the "Ceremonial Quarter" in Veio (6th–5th century BC: Belelli Marchesini, Michetti 2017: 483) or the common houses of the Hellenistic period, as in Akragas (insula III, domus M: Belfiori 2019).

THE ANCIENT LITERARY SOURCES

In antiquity, the rite of killing dogs was likely associated with various religious, magical, and purifying behaviours, linked with the particular value attributed to the animal, generally considered impure. The Greeks and the Romans perceived the dog in contiguity with death and the Underworld deities. Many traditions associate the animal with Hecate, as the guide goddess of the spirits on earth, but also with Artemis and Aphrodite/Venus, as well as with the deities such as Ilithyia-Eiloneia, Genetyllis, the Erinni, and the Moires (Di Giuseppe 2005: 257). All these were believed to protect female fertility and procreation and were sometimes the personifications of gestation and labour.

In the Greek and the Roman worlds, dog sacrifices were used in purification and passage rites (Pausanias, *Helládos periègghēsis*, III, 20, 8; XIV, 8 10; Plutarchus, *Quaestiones Romanae*, 68, 280C; 111, 290B; see a detailed collection in Di Giuseppe 2017: 559–560). Such rites were performed even in central Italy: a goat and a female dog were immolated during the spring festivals "Robigalia," dedicated to Robigus/Robigo, who protected the harvest; the ceremony "Augurium canarium" included the sacrifice of red dogs at the end of April to ensure the ripening of the harvest (Ovidius, *Fasti*, IV, 905–942; Columella, *Res Rustica*, X, 337–347). For the same purpose, puppies were immolated before sowing and dogs were killed at the Porta Catularia in Rome (Columella, *Res Rustica*, II, 21, 4).

The Tabulae Iguvinae, bronze slabs from the 3rd–1st century BC, written in the Umbrian language, offer a detailed description of an expiatory rite in

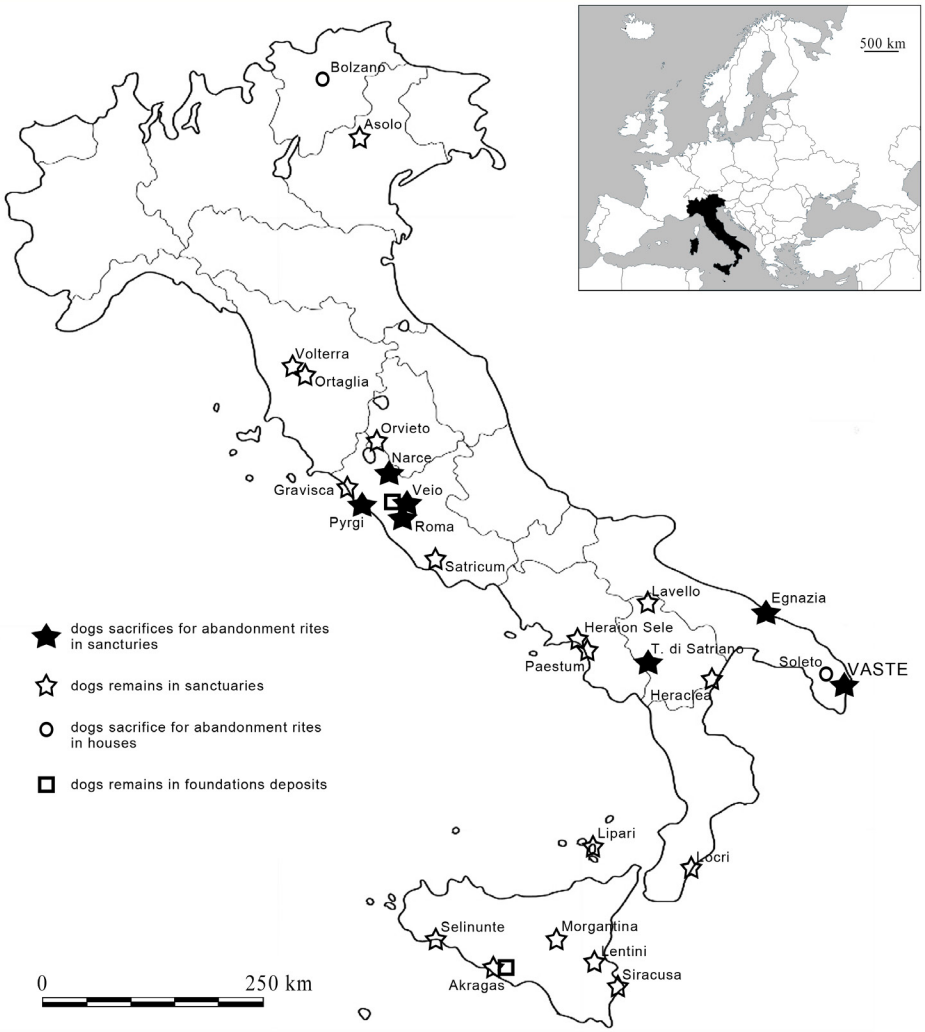

Fig. 7. Distribution map of archaeological dogs remains from cultic contexts in pre-Roman Italy. University of Salento: Laboratory of Classical Archaeology, 2022.

honour of Hondo Giovio: the body of a dog was partly burnt and consumed and partly buried at the foot of an altar (Ancillotti, Cerri 1996).

Pliny the Elder (*Naturalis Historia*, XXIX, 57) describes "supplicia canum," "the punishment of the dogs," an annual summer sacrifice in which live dogs were hung from a fork or a cross, while geese were honoured with gold and purple: it was believed that the geese saved the Romans on the "Capitolium" during the Gallic siege in 386 BC, while the dogs failed to bark, which is why they were ritually punished each year.

As for the custom of eating dogs, it is interesting to notice that in Aristophanes' "Knights" (1399), Paphlagonian is recommended to sell

sausages from the meat of asses and dogs near the city gate. Moreover, according to a Hippocratic writer (*De Morbo Sacro*), dog meat, along with the flesh of a goat, stag, and sow, was useful as treatment for bowel disorder. The former context is certainly a joke, and this kind of sausages was not very common; the latter disapproves of popular beliefs and the faith in purifiers. Dog meat was part of the Greek diet, even though the ancient authors did not hold it in high regard; in a way, it was an unusual/not normative use (Pakkanen 2015: 42–43).

The Latin grammarian Festus speaks about a particular bloody sacrifice of horses, on the occasion of "October Equus," which took place in Rome in honour of Mars. A non-feeding horse sacrifice was also performed once a year by the Sallentini-Messapians, who lived in Southern Apulia, the same region as Vaste; it consisted in throwing an animal alive into the fire in honour of Juppiter Menzana. On the one hand, Romans considered horse meat disgusting and inedible, so horses could be sacrificed only on specific occasions, especially connected with the closing of military campaigns before the arrival of winter in October; on the other hand, the Messapians were especially celebrated for horse breeding and horse-riding (Polibius, *Historiae*, II, 24; Livius, *Ab urbe condita*, XXIV, 20; Pausanias, *Helládos periḕghēsis*, V, 19, 10). This kind of non-feeding sacrifice was also performed in Greece, in Sparta and Rhodes, and in Italy, among the Veneti.

Analysing both the archaeological data and the literary sources, Gunnel Ekroth (2007) has pointed out that in Greek sanctuaries dogs and horses could be edible victims. However, he states that they cannot be classified in the same way as pigs, sheep, and cattle; they were occasional victims to compensate for the shortage of the main species. Pigs, sheep, and cattle correspond to the domestic sacrificial triad, in which these animals were at the top of a kind of pyramid, while horses and dogs were outside it. We can imagine the same for Messapians; after all, sacrificial feeding rituals reconstructed on the basis of archaeological records normally do not seem to include dogs and horses.

In conclusion, the archaeological data and the literary sources from the ancient times imply that dogs and horses belonged to the category of animals functionally separated from the species that were normally eaten and sacrificed. So, what is the logical relationship between their being considered inedible and their being used in rituals that did not involve consumption of the sacrificial victim?

G. M.

BETWEEN ARCHAEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

The hermeneutics of a ritual is difficult due to the paucity of written sources on the subject and despite the presence of archaeological data, which is material and contextual. The former, besides being reliable, result from

thedevelopment of a society in a historical context and therefore reflect ideologies and beliefs, intellectual and psychological aspects. Even ritual actions, which are tentatively reconstructed on the basis of archaeological data, were originally conceived and lived by humans; they come from specific cultures and traditions. Those who approach the study of rites can choose between two options (Scarduelli 2000: 50–52; Scarduelli 2007: 271–282). The first one concerns the analysis and interpretation of the symbolic and cultural content (Geertz 1998: 21–42) on the basis of the elements suggested by the actors who know the rites; it is based on the principle that a ritual action originates from a belief. Alternatively, it must be kept in mind that the motivations for ritual behaviour do not reside in the minds of the actors, but are brought about by environmental and economic-social factors: ritual practices would be preponderant with respect to beliefs. The role of the scholar / observer is fundamental, as he/she is able to judge from the outside (Scarduelli 2007: 273–274). As archaeologists, we try to explain an archaeological context, that is, the association of artefacts and ecofacts inside a stratigraphy deriving from anthropic actions. For this purpose, we started by reading the theories of Victor Turner and Catherine Bell, resumed by Scarduelli.

Regarding the sacrifices of dogs, we propose a tentative explanation of the rationale for the rite based on analysis of the structural characteristics of symbolic and cultural systems in different geographical and chronological contexts. Many other situations could have been taken into account, probably, even more relevant ones. However, we consider this work as an attempt of using ethnography for the purposes of archaeological explanation in a field normally reserved for reading the ancient Greek and Roman literary sources. This idea is proposed as an alternative to the reading based on the dynamics of cultural contact, provided that the spread of a ritual can be explained exclusively in terms of interaction or assimilation between peoples and cultures (Hofman 2010 with prev. bibl.).

Dogs and horses belong to a category of animals “functionally” separated from the edible and expendable species, as their meat was not consumed (ThesCRA I, 2a: 149). We then ask ourselves about the meaning of their being considered inedible and their being used in rites that did not involve consumption of the sacrificial victim. Is there a logical relationship between animal food taboos and ritual choices?

These types of rites, documented in very distant communities, in geographical and historical terms, often have a common material aspect and, above all, seem to revolve around the concepts of atonement and purification. Thus, Mary Douglas deepened the concept of purity, paying particular attention to “anomalous” animals in the food and ritual dimensions in her study of the Lele community of the Congo and in the contextual examination of the biblical passage of the Leviticus dedicated to abominations (Douglas 1957; 1993). Prohibitions and food taboos are part of the “separation

rituals" characterized by rules of discrimination and prohibition, which are underpinned by a conceptual categorisation of animal species. According to the scholar, people are inclined to the natural classification based on the concepts of purity and contamination; in this way, they give moral sense to their existence and a logical sense to the Universe.

Cristiano Grottanelli (Grottanelli 1988: 37) believes that the animal categories recall the classification and the logical and symbolic orders proposed by Lévi-Strauss (Lévi-Strauss 1971; 1972). In every cultural-historical context, there are functional classifications of animals linked with edibility and therefore with sacrifice (there are also "theoretical" and "speculative" orderings, according to the lévistraussian thought). First of all, there are "forbidden" animals, then animals permitted for "sacrifice" and eating; finally, there are animals that (like the horse in Rome?) seem to be killed, and "offered" ritually, but not consumed. Thus, the horse in Rome is an expendable, "military", victim in October with reference to the "royal" prehistorical Martius Camp.

In a given cultural context, specific ritual attitudes affect some animals and do not affect others; besides, the intensity of the involvement of animals in a ritual varies greatly from species to species. Therefore, there is a link between ritual behaviour and the possibility of eating the meat of specific species.

The British anthropologist Edmund Leach (Leach 1964: 23–63), proceeding from the works of Radcliff-Brown (Radcliff-Brown 1939), developed the concept of the "ritual value" of animals in more detail. A society produces a classification of food environment, only a small part of which is used for nourishment. Such a system has practical and moral consequences. Furthermore, it represents a shared tool that the society as a whole tends to use and to consider right. According to Leach, the edible part of the environment in which we live can be divided as follows (Leach 1964: 30–31): 1) edible substances that are part of the diet; 2) edible substances recognised as food but forbidden to eat (think about the prohibitions of pork among Jews and Muslims or ox among the Brahamans), except under particular conditions (ritual) — these foods are consciously overloaded with taboos; 3) edible substances not recognised as food — these substances are unconsciously loaded with taboos.

Leach (1964: 125) underlines that, like in spoken English, there are contexts in which one can think of humans and dogs as creatures of the same nature: they are "companions," and a dog is a "man's friend." Mankind and food are antithetical categories: if a human being is not food, neither can be a dog. All this is consistent with the attitude of many modern Western societies towards dogs and horses: both are seen almost as sacred and supernatural creatures, endowed with feelings, which, ambiguously, may be the feelings of fear and horror.

In Leach's theory, the concept of taboos applies to anomalous categories with respect to well-defined oppositions. The edibility of animals, as is true for matrimonial and sexual rules, corresponds to their different distances from humans, in terms of proximity, distance and intermediate distance. The third phase, in which the attributes of the other two converge, contains more taboos and elements with a high ritual value.

Even Stanley J. Tambiah (1995: 195–250) addressed this topic by collecting the legacy of Levi-Strauss, Douglas, and Leach. Some points in his investigation are common with the experiences of these scholars, including classification systems, prohibitions, and taboos (food, sexual relations, and rituals). Tambiah's goal was to investigate the structural properties of cultural and symbolic systems (Tambiah 1995: 250).

Tambiah examined the rural village of Baan Phraan Muan in northeastern Thailand (fig. 8). In that area, the economy revolves around the monoculture of rice, and the village is divided into groups of fenced houses inhabited by families that are connected by close parental ties. The farmers raise, within the respective properties, a few species of domestic animals, such as buffalos, oxen, pigs, chickens, and ducks. However, most animal-based food comes from fishing in the flooded fields, in the canals and the swamps (sad naam); hunting is a marginal activity.

Like Leach, Tambiah also analysed three issues that seem to be closely related to each other: 1) the rules of marriage and sexual relations; 2) the subdivision of the house; and 3) the classification of animals (sad), divided into domestic animals (sad baan) and forest animals (sad paa). In summary, the rules of sexual relations and marriage indicate social distances; the divisions of the house represent spatial distances with social implications;

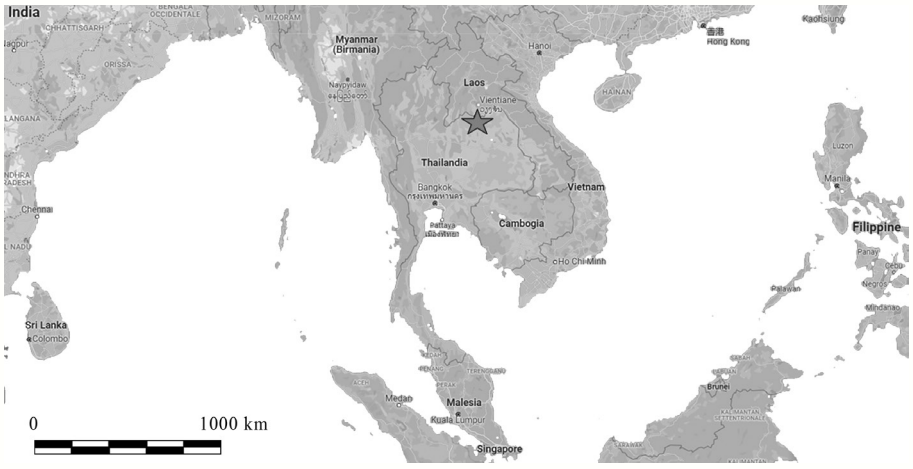

Fig. 8. Site location of Baan Phraan Muan in Thailand. University of Salento: Laboratory of Classical Archaeology, 2022.

and the food rules regarding animals are the signals of the "edibility distance." The scholar noted that there are precise correspondences among various levels of the classes (tab. 1).

Tab. 1: Relationship between series (after Tambiah 1995: 224, tab. 4.2)

Human series	*Blood siblings*	*First cousins* (second cousins are ambiguous)	*Classificatory siblings beyond second cousins*	*Other people*	*Outsiders*
Marriage and sex rules	Incest taboo	Marriage taboo; sex not condoned	Recommended marriage (and sex)	Marriage and sex possible	No marriage
House categories Rules relating to house space	Haung Phoen and Haung Suam Sleeping rules separating parents from son-in-law and married daughter	*Sleeping room* Rights of entry but not sleeping	*Guest room* Taboo to cross threshold to principal bedroom	*Platform* Visitors wash feet if invited in	*Compound fence* Excludes outsiders
Animals series	*Domestic animals that live inside the house*	*Domestic animals that live under the house* (and have been reared there)	*Domestic animals belonging to other households*	*Animals of the forest*	*Powerful animals of the forest Monkeys*
Eating rules	Inedible and **taboo**	Cannot be eaten at ceremonials	Eminently edible at ceremonials	Edible	Inedible and **taboo**

Many norms that regulate the classification of living creatures appear to be linked with the religious tradition coming from Buddhism, as well as with the local ideological and cultural memory interconnected, in turn, with a multiform daily ritual.

A worthy topic of attention is that of the rules concerning the ritualistic use of animals. Among these, dogs (*maa*) enjoy a prominent position: they are close to humans, they have the freedom to enter and leave the house, and they sleep inside the house. However, a dog also arouses paradoxical and negative feelings. Even though it may be considered a friend of humans, it is not a "pet" in the Western sense: it is treated with indifference; it is

considered dirty because it eats faeces and is incestuous *par excellence*, since children and parents can copulate; finally, the numerous insulting verbal expressions in which dogs are referred to are among the gravest. Although close to humans, a dog is therefore treated as a "degraded human being" (*pen khaung tam*). It is not edible, which is not a simple mental attitude but a real and powerful taboo. In the ritual context, dogs are considered a metonymic instrument in the reparatory rite to erase the supernatural dangers arising from an incorrect marriage, such as that between second cousins: the spouses must imitate dogs and eat rice from a turtle shell in such a way that the punishing spirits are led to believe that the couple are actually dogs and not humans (Tambiah 1995: 221).

Buffalos (*khuay*), as well as oxen (*ngau*), enjoy a positive importance. These animals retain vital importance for agriculture by virtue of ploughing rice fields; they are a subject of great care; they are invested with a mythical role in the tradition of the foundation of human settlements in the area. A buffalo is attributed "the essence of the spirit" (*khwan*), just as humans. Beef is rarely consumed on ordinary occasions, while it is specially selected for the celebration of regional propitiatory rites or for ceremonial events, such as weddings, provided that the ritual practices are respected: the animal must come from another house or village rather than from the place where it is being sacrificed.

A second and curious analogy helps to clarify the logic of the reading proposed by Tambiah. The community of Baan Phraan Muan celebrates the worshipping of the village spirits and practices rituals to appease the anger of the evil spirits (*phii*). The most common sacrificial victims are chickens and ducks: a cooked chicken is offered in collective rites to propitiate the harvest. Different animals are sacrificed to appease the spirits depending on the severity of the offense to be repaired: chickens and ducks are used for minor sins, and pigs for more serious offenses. A buffalo is offered on only one occasion, during a regional celebration dedicated to the spirit of Bueng Chuean, the protector of the great swamp around which the small villages of the area are located. The purpose of the ritual is to conjure an abundant rainfall before ploughing. All the participating villages contribute to the purchase of the animal.

In consequence, a ranking of victims emerges corresponding to the importance of the rite: cattle are at the top, as the most important working animals and the only ones to possess "the essence of the spirit"; pigs are in the second position; chickens and ducks have fewer ritual implications and are more common in less important ceremonies, just as they are prevalent in daily meals. The hierarchy of ritualistic use follows the same order as the places assigned to various animal species in the residential area.

In conclusion, Tambiah states that the relationship between the human and the animal worlds in the Thai village demonstrates coexistence

of two attitudes of varying intensity: a sense of affinity, on one hand, and distinction and separation, on the other. Dietary rules are intrinsic to these relationships and provide a key to understanding the ritual interest in animals. This system shows a complexity similar to the one that Lèvi-Strauss found in the analysis of the conventional nomenclature used for birds, dogs, cattle, and race horses in France (Lévi-Strauss 1971: 210–237). It is based on metaphorical and metonymic relationships deriving from contiguity and similarity. These concepts, borrowed from linguistics and psychology, can be used in anthropological research to analyse the mechanisms of magical rituals (Jakobson 1956; Tambiah 1995: 68–70).

In the Thai village, the social esteem of dogs associates them with humans; the dog has a metonymic relationship with society, so it cannot be eaten because it is assimilated to human beings, even if degraded ones. For the latter reason, it is considered negatively at the ritual level and represents incorrect sexual and matrimonial relations, bordering on incestuosness; non-normative relationships must be repaired with the help of a ritual with a metonymic value. The ox and the buffalo are the products of human activity forming part of the technical and economic system. The great esteem they enjoy indicates that there is no confusion between the human and the animal: an ox and a buffalo are not "human," and, unlike in the case of dogs, the ritual rules of their killing correspond to a correct conduct in marriage and in sexual relations.

We are aware that contemporary Thailand appears to be too far from ancient Vaste, and some scholars may find other kinds of analysis more adequate. For instance, we see a further possible enhancement of this study by means of a systematic approach to modern and contemporary beliefs and rituals in Sardinia and other Italian regions, especially those that attribute to the dog a significant role as a guardian, both real and symbolic / apotropaic (Moretti 1955: 62; Alziator 1978: 231; Atzori, Satta 1980: 193–194). As another example, we can mention the custom of burying puppies for propitiatory purposes in place of new-borns during diocesan synods (Corrain, Zampini 1970: 308).

DISCUSSION

The particular sacrificial regime of some animal species, domestic but not edible, does not seem accidental. Sacrifices of dogs and horses appear to be linked with occasional situations and specific needs (expiation rites, consecrations to war, transitions of state, and subsequent purifications of a sacred place) and not with the type of rituals in which the pact between humans and the extra-Human was sealed by food sharing. There are two attitudes in the ritual of sacrifice that correspond to different logics.

Tambiah, like other anthropologists, suggests that the ritual role of animal species corresponds to the intensity of the food taboo. To understand this logic, it is necessary to evaluate the zoological characteristics of animals, their economic roles, but we must primarily take into account the emotional and intellectual attitudes that society and individual humans had to them.

Animals are personifications of ideas with high emotional intensity and are effective tools of objectification of human ideas and feelings. This fact explains the relationship between the ritual and the cultural, as well as the symbolic apparatus in which they are "clothed" (Detienne, Vernant 1982).

Regarding the basic idea that informs Tambiah, we have tentatively captured a structural similarity between the classifications of animal species in the Thai village and in the Greek, Latin and Italic worlds. These classifications are based not on the identity of zoological species, but on the intellectual and emotional distances that animals have in the social conception of a particular culture. For example, in the ancient Mediterranean and the contemporary Thai rituals, cattle occupy the same levels, while the role of sheep-goats and pigs in the sanctuaries of the Greek and Messapian world corresponds to that of pigs, chickens and ducks in the village of Thailand (fig. 9). Different ritual functions of taxa may correspond to different economic and social esteems, but in a larger degree these functions are subordinated to the emotional and ideological ones (Tambiah 1995: 31).

Horses had an important role in the life of humans in the Italic world because they were a symbol of royalty and high status (Bennet Pascal 1981: 261–291). A horse played a fundamental role in the war context: a warrior's battle companion, close but dependent on him, it was metonymically an extension of the warring society. The logic described above leads us to think that the ritual killing of a horse had a metonymic value and symbolised the extreme sacrifice of the man consecrated to war.

We can also easily imagine a metonymic relationship between dogs and humans in the Italic world: a dog is a man's companion, close to the family and the home. However, it is also imbued with conflicting and paradoxical feelings, as the ancient sources testify, because a dog was considered impure *par excellence* and symbolically close to death and the Underworld. The dog Cerberus is the guardian of Hades, the Underworld, so it has a close relationship with it and can intervene in the rites of passage from life to death.

How can the dog sacrifices be interpreted in the Messapian context, and more generally in the Italic-Preroman one? The ritual could metonymically represent the expiation of negative human behaviours: the serious but necessary act of de-sacralising a place or manipulating objects destined as ex-votos to the deities, to the point of being untouchable, leads to a divine condemnation, which will fall not on humans but on their metonymic substitute: a dog. Besides, even the Zoroastrian religion suggests the idea

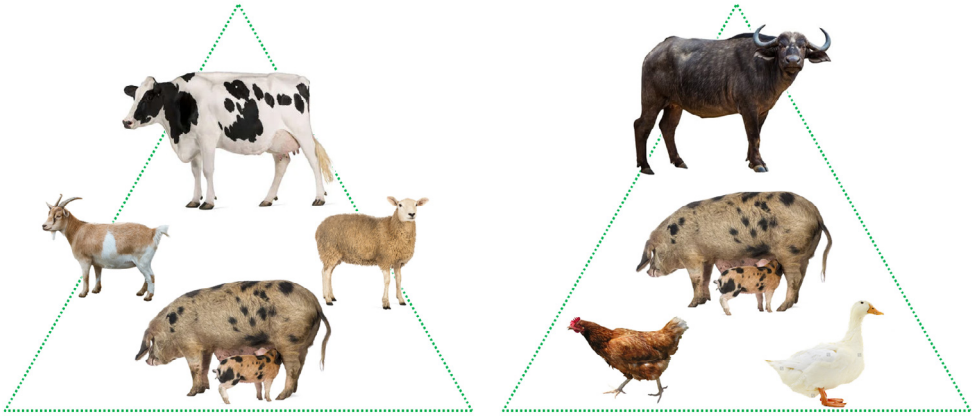

Fig. 9. Comparison between ancient Mediterranean and modern Thailand ranking system of sacrificial animals. University of Salento: Laboratory of Classical Archaeology, 2022

of the metonymical correspondence between humans and dogs (Kryukova 2020; Kryukova in this volume). However, we must remember how complex the interpretation of legends and myths about dogs is, as already argued by Alberto De Gubernatis (1872, II: 18).

D. T.

THE CONCLUDING NOTE

In conclusion, I would tentatively suggest that sacrifices of dogs could be seen as a substitution aimed at confusing the gods, as is exemplified by both the Thai and the Messapian rituals. After all, the idea of the Greek "thysia," the bloody feeding sacrifice, originates from a trick: the deception hatched up by Prometheus against Zeus (Hesiod, Theogonìa, 535–557). Not only Prometheus but even Hermes played the role of a trickster in the act of establishing the sacrifice (Burkert 1984: 842–845). This dishonest behaviour comes from the human need to take advantage of the edible part of the animal, while a god, being immortal, would have been satiated by the smoke of the burnt fat-covered bones, the offering that Zeus was deceived into accepting.

The Greeks knew a lot about tricks, especially about dog sacrifices, as is demonstrated by the mysterious and ambiguous decoration on the inner round of an Attic cup by the Painter of Epidromos (510–500 BC), at the Wien Kunsthistorisches Museum, in which Hermes is leading a dog disguised as a pig to the altar for sacrifice (fig. 10).

As for Vaste in particular, we can imagine that dog sacrifices were performed to purify the pit into which the votive deposits were subsequently relocated with the aim of celebrating the abandonment of such a site. At the

Fig. 10. Red-figure kylix by the Epidromos Painter. Hermes leads a dog disguised as a pig. URL: www.khm.at/en/object/56674/ (access date: 12 June 2023). Image courtesy of Wien Kunsthistoriches Museum

first step, dogs were chosen because they were impure animals normally sacrificed in this kind of rite; at the last stage, dogs were immolated as noble animals, almost at the same level as humans. The "trick," the sacrifice of a substitutive victim, was performed, and the gods could be deceived by being offered a humanlike sacrifice. Finally, the dog sacrifices seemed to be the best, but they actually were the worst.

G. M.

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